

## Five Roma Education Fund Models of Intervention for Inclusive Education

The Roma Education Fund (REF) has gained extensive experience and knowledge about different types of interventions and approaches to Roma education that produce results on the ground. A comprehensive system of project evaluation has collected evidence-based data sets that have been generated by REF's different pilots and scaling up of good practice models for achieving results in different countries and policy settings in 16 countries in Central and South Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Among their features, REF models include: well-defined project development objectives, result frameworks, output and outcome indicators, risk assessment combined with risk mitigation measures, project management and implementation requirements, and monitoring and evaluation tools. The value of these models is that they can be adopted and implemented on an achievable scale, while good practice emerges in good policy at local regional and national level.

1. REF succeeded in the last decade to replace a need-based approach of sponsoring NGO proposals with a more targeted use of resources to fund the models that REF and its partners believe will generate effective results. REF has a good geographic reach, with projects spanning countries across Central and Eastern Europe, including EU member states and candidate countries; and a significant range of interventions to promote Roma inclusion at all levels in the education cycle, from preschool to post-graduate studies. REF experienced ten years of remarkable growth: in 2005 REF reached 5,000 beneficiaries, in 2015 REF's outreach multiplied twentyfold and the cumulative number of annual beneficiary's averages 100,000. REF is continuously researching how to accommodate innovative and promising solutions that are broadly defined as models and that have proven to be effective.
2. The education policy priorities identified by the Commission and its urgent call on Member States to combat discrimination stand as an affirmation of REF's five models of intervention from preschool enrollment to university graduation. REF's experience stands as proof that fostering partnerships to promote inclusive education so that Roma children have full access and equal opportunities is not just the right thing to do but makes sense for the entire society. Effective education is about inclusiveness, ensuring every citizen has an opportunity to develop his or her talents and being part of a shared future. Inclusion must be part and parcel of the broader quest for excellence, quality and relevance in education. And Roma inclusion

must be part and parcel of the broader 2020 European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable, and Inclusive Growth.

3. What makes REF interventions successful is that more than a decade's worth of effort has been invested into cooperating with line ministries, mayors, schools and teachers; and the fact that so much effort has gone into ensuring Roma participation and parental empowerment. REF has invested in programs that help to improve educational outcomes on all educational levels for Roma children by developing programs based on innovation and has good models which have been scaled up by with local authorities and governments. Significantly we have seen some governments, municipalities and teaching institutions become more active partners by assuming an increasing share of the costs and implementation of REF project and programs. REF interventions on ECD and secondary scholarships are serving as models for government's systemic change in education.
4. The five models described below have a structure emulating from research and practice are adopting a well-defined methodology, with flexibility to adopt those components that are applicable in the context of the localities where they plan to implement a program. All the models include a cross-sectorial component on promoting desegregation and integration of Roma in inclusive mainstream education.
5. REF's approach of targeted action in education has a relevance and significance that goes beyond Roma inclusion; REF's model interventions can serve as a blueprint for other disadvantaged groups and show precisely and pragmatically how action measures can be mainstreamed and fully integrated into public policy to promote equal opportunities and equitable outcomes for all. For instance, "school after school" interventions.

## REF's Interventions and Funding Are Based on Five Models of Intervention for Inclusive Education

### Model 1 – Expanding Access to Preschool Education: Early Childhood Education

REF's early childhood education and care (ECEC) model aims to improve the school readiness and early childhood development outcomes of Roma children aged between zero to six by improving the enrollment and attendance in the mainstream ECD services; enhancing the parenting skills and improving the practices of Roma parents; strengthening the link between parents and preschool facilities; and raising the quality of ECD services, such as teaching and learning methods.

The ECD model has five main components:

- **Improving the access and participation in mainstream**, non-segregated ECD services by eliminating the existing barriers to access to and participation in preschool and ECD services by (provision of need-based material/financial support, transport, intense communication and work with the Roma parents through preschool mediators, direct support for enrollment and information campaigns). Direct facilitation for enrollment of Roma children in their final year in ECD into mainstream non-segregated primary education by ensuring all required documentation are prepared and that administrative criteria for enrolling into integrated primary schools are met by all REF beneficiaries.
- **Roma parents and community mobilization** to participate in project activities by tailored home visits including aiming to assess: *financial situation of the families, vaccination and health examination, identity documents, information about requirements for enrolment, assessment of children's educational development needs, pre-natal assistance*. Provide family counseling in order to improve parenting practices, parental preschool involvement, enrollment support, attendance monitoring, emphasize the need for regular medical check-ups and immunization of children, arrange vaccination campaigns for the children. to build trust between communities and early childhood education and care institutions (i) designing a curriculum of topics to be covered during the community motivation events, based on the identified issues of interest, (ii) mobilizing local specialists (e.g., social workers, preschool teachers, health workers, school mediators). All actions are developed together with the parents.
- **Improvement of parenting skills** and practices of parents (mothers, in particular) of Roma children aged zero to six through informal literacy training, lessons in storytelling (My Story), establishment of a Toy Library for children, organizing community events with parents (on

early childhood nutrition, health and education etc.), and enhancing the interaction of parents with ECD and preschool institutions (Home School Community Liaison). This constructivist learning technique encourages readers to explore the text and facilitates improved comprehension. By engaging the women with a story in this way, the facilitator is able to both engage them with the text and model a teaching technique to be replicated with their children. The implementation of this approach includes the following actions: (i) approaching and involving Roma mothers of preschool age children in need of non-formal adult education; (ii) facilitators nurturing non-formal adult education aiming at empowering Roma mothers through increasing literacy and reading skills; (iii) implementation of non-formal adult education for Roma parents with the assistance of facilitators.

- **Quality of teaching and learning** of Roma children in preschools – by strengthening the **capacity of teachers and caregivers** to provide child-centered education, facilitating learning through Roma teacher assistants and stimulating the links between preschools, academia and pedagogy students. Actions tailored according to the specific needs of the target population with the ultimate goal of improving the competences of teachers/staff working directly or indirectly with children from birth to age six. In addition to these training sessions, workshops will be delivered to teachers to introduce them to (i) different ECD assessment tools and how to use them (e.g., the ISSA Continuum for Assessing Caregivers, child assessment tool based on child’s portfolio, IDELA), (ii) quality practices for building an inclusive learning environment; (iii) relationship with family; (iv) interaction between teacher, children, parents and mediator
- **Working with tertiary education institutions** – for future educators, this component seeks to establish and strengthen the links between ECD practitioners and teams engaged in the implementation of the Project with colleges and universities offering pedagogical programs (including on ECD). REF is aiming changes in university curricula and adoption of practical models into student’s practices.

## Model 2 – Avoiding Early School Leaving in Primary Education

REF's primary education model intends to improve primary education outcomes, improve access to primary education, prevent early school leaving, facilitate the transition to secondary education and enhancing parenting skills of Roma children aged between six and 14 by supporting primary education enrollment and providing additional/remedial classes (school-after-school programs, tutoring and mentoring), strengthening the link between parents and schools, and offering professional support and guidance to school staff and authorities

The primary model has four main components:

- **Access and enrollment** – support for Roma parents in making well-informed decisions about the type and quality of the school into which their first-grade student enrolls, aiming to prevent them from enrolling their children in segregated, low-quality schools or special schools via provision of intense communication with schools and work with the Roma parents and provision of in-kind support. This includes: (i) raising awareness on the importance of education and school choice/assisting in enrollment process, (ii) providing enrollment information and direct support to Roma parents and children, (iii) providing in-kind support, (iv) mediation between families and primary education institutions, (v) identification of early school leavers, (vi) Reintegration of early school leavers, (vii) monitoring of school attendance during project activities.
- **Continuing monitoring of the child's progress** – developing a database containing information on schools and beneficiaries of the project, which is updated constantly in order to effectively manage the beneficiary selection process and track students' academic progress, attendance rates, data about the student's needs, and students' learning needs. A diagnostic and formative assessment of students and development of student individual learning plans should be envisaged with all information being shared with the pupil's class teachers.
- **Academic performance, retention and transition to secondary education** – aims to improve the academic performance of Roma children of primary education age by strengthening the link between parents and schools, providing after school support, providing academic need-tailored support and guidance in order to decrease early school leaving and facilitate the transition from primary to secondary education. (i. develop mentorship/tutorship program activities, ii develop partnership with universities for recruiting student as mentors/tutors iii. improve student-school relations through use of school mediators and ensure parental involvement in education process. iv. develop and implement "School after school" and

problem-solving activities for children to apply learned knowledge. v. develop recreational activities for children (intercultural summer camps, cultural activities, etc.):

- **Transition between grades and to secondary education level** includes: (i) organizing local community meetings to identify problems regarding early school leaving and lower transition rates, (ii) reintegrating out of school children (if national educational system allows reintegration at primary education level), (iii) providing academic counseling and advising to reintegrated students failed exams, (iv) involving parents and other key community members in school community (e.g., Roma school mediators, Roma teacher's assistants, and Roma representatives on the parent's council, school board, etc.), (v) providing academic support counseling and advising to students transitioning to secondary schools, (vi) organize open doors visits to secondary schools, (vii) encourage Roma students to participate in student board/school government in school.

### **Model 3 – Expanding Access to Secondary Education**

The secondary education model aims to improve the academic performance of students and to increase the retention and graduation rate of Roma secondary school students, and their transition to tertiary level through better outreach, provision of scholarships, school-based mentorship support and tutorship support.

The secondary scholarship model is using a balanced triangulation provision of merit-based scholarships, mentoring and tutoring school based.

- **Provision of merit-based scholarships is based upon:** (i) announcing a call for application, (ii) selecting applicants based on the eligibility criteria, (iii) informing all selected and non-selected applicant about the decision of the selection committee, (iv) dealing with grievance cases and (v) issuing contracts to the selected students. The community and school-based awareness raising activities aiming to motivate Roma parents to keep their children in the educational system and to encourage them to continue in the secondary and tertiary education level are a key element. Monitoring the progress is another important component: every three months the scholarship recipients are required to submit quarterly reports that contain objective information on their academic progress, plus their satisfaction with mentoring and tutoring and other services received within the project.
- **School-based mentoring and tutoring** is comprised of: (i) identification of potential/existing tutors/mentors (based on minimum requirements set either formally by institutions or by REF), (ii) training of tutors/mentors, (iii) development/update of job descriptions and terms of reference for tutors/mentors, (iv) recruitment of tutors/mentors and (v) identification of the learning needs of beneficiaries Roma secondary education students. The mentoring program includes the selection and training of mentors and monitoring their work. REF continually advocates with national institutions to formally integrate mentoring into the educational system. The REF tutoring mentoring approach has three key defining features: (a) helping students get better grades; (b) improving their social and communication skills; (c) increasing each student's self-confidence and self-esteem. Every three months the project team collects students' grades, attendance records and other data that enable them to follow the progress on an individual basis.

#### **Model 4 – Expanding Access to Higher Education: Romaversitas**

The Romaversitas aims to improve the retention, performance and graduation levels of Roma full-time tertiary education students by providing them with individual and group academic tutoring and mentoring and to help strengthen their Roma identity and community participation.

This model consists of compulsory and optional/elective components and it serves as a bridge for young Roma scholars towards employment and active citizenship, by providing tailored needs training in professional development, IT, foreign language competences.

- **Academic support** (i) tutoring carrying out an assessment of the tutorship needs of the target tertiary students; (ii) developing an individual portfolio for each student that will include academic data (minimum number of exams to be passed and other academic criteria requested by the university), development plan, list of the duties and responsibilities of the tutors and tutees, and other relevant data; (iii) identifying tutors to provide individual tutoring. The tutors will be identified either by the tutee(s), or by the project staff when the tutee(s) cannot identify the tutor for the topic/or if specific knowledge is needed. The tutors will be drawn from tertiary graduates, senior tertiary students with outstanding academic achievements, and junior university professors; (iv) defining the topics for tutorship in relation to the identified needs of the tutees, primarily with regard to the difficulties they experience with mandatory subjects; (v) the tutees together with the tutors will schedule and submit a plan of activities to the project staff; (vi) administering and monitoring the implementation of the individual academic tutoring activity by designated project staff member/s.
- **Foreign language courses and IT skills** – help Roma tertiary students to develop skills necessary for their successful academic development and managing in any sphere of life, including finding a job, by providing them with technical and communication skills trainings and foreign language courses and IT. This component is done within accredited schools for language and IT companies and includes: (i) identifying and recruiting trainers among schools and companies well-known in their field of work; (ii) creating and implementing (by the trainers) of practical and interactive training programs comprised of theoretical and practical part; (iii) developing and keeping students' (trainees') portfolios where the trainers fill in with information on the training topics and the performance of the trainees on the various assigned tasks and final exams/tests; (iv) administering and monitoring the implementation of the professional development mentoring by designated project staff member/s.
- **Provision of book allowance learning materials support and student initiatives/research small grants** – contribute to improving the retention and/or performance and/or graduation levels of Roma tertiary students from low-income families by providing them support for



learning materials to cover the cost of books and other study materials necessary for preparation of their exams. Support Roma tertiary students to further expand, express, and exchange their academic and practical knowledge and skills in their fields of studies, ensure connection of Roma students with academia and society and/or the Roma community in general by providing them with small grants to conduct researches and/or implement public events such as debates and discussions etc.

- **Building-up a network of active Roma intellectuals in the Roma student community** – by aiming at strengthening the identity and preservation of Roma language, costumes, culture and history. The second aspect of this effort is the creation of an alumni network that helps network and exchange, increase the visibility of successful Roma students in society through common good. Roma related public initiatives developed by future professionals and other initiatives are emerging from this component.

## **Model 5 – Second Chance Programs for Adult Functional Literacy and Formal School Completion**

REF's adult education and training model aims to raise education attainment levels of Roma young adults with incomplete primary and/or secondary education. It provides those with incomplete primary and/or secondary education with tutoring and financial support for completing formal primary and/or secondary education. This model also aims to improve the literacy and social communication skills of illiterate and semi-literate Romani parents (mainly mothers) of preschool- and school-age children and enhance their involvement in their children's education through provision of non-formal literacy and social communication skills trainings.

It aims to: (a) raise education attainment levels of Roma youth (specify age range) adults with incomplete primary and/or secondary education by funding their attendance in "Second chance" programs and providing mentorship and tutorship; and (b) improve the literacy levels and social-communication skills of illiterate and semiliterate Roma parents (primarily mothers) of preschool-age and school-age children and enhance their involvement in their children's education by providing them with non-formal literacy trainings and social communication skills trainings.

- **Provision of adult formal primary education** – includes (i) assessing the needs of adult primary education among the targeted young Roma adults in the project locality/s; (ii) outreaching for and enrolment of project participants; (iii) identifying, recruiting and (if necessary) training of adult primary education tutors; (iv) developing and maintaining of an individual portfolio for each direct beneficiary including information on the minimum number of exams to be taken and other academic criteria requested by the school/project, as well as attendance and performance data; (v) provision of the primary adult education tutoring activity; and (vi) administering and monitoring the implementation of the activity by designated project staff member/s.
- **Provision of adult formal general secondary education** – comprises: (i) assessing the needs for adult general/ VET secondary education of the target young Roma adults in the project locality/s; (ii) outreaching for and enrolment of participants; (iii) identifying, recruiting and (if necessary) training of tutors in general secondary adult education; (iv) developing curriculum for adult general secondary education (if such is not already available) and class schedule. Both the curriculum and the class schedule will be developed through consultations with the direct beneficiaries and the tutors; (v) developing and maintaining for each adult learner of an individual portfolio that will include information on the minimum number of exams to be passed and other academic criteria requested by the school/project, as well as attendance and academic performance data; (vi) provision of secondary education tutoring; (vii) administering and monitoring the implementation of the activity by designated project staff member/s.

- **Provision of non-formal literacy and social communication skills** trainings for Roma parents of preschool-age and school-age children includes the provision of reading skills training (**phase 1**) by: (i) approaching and involving Roma parents (mainly mothers) of preschool-age and school-age children in need of reading skills training; (ii) selecting and training facilitators in non-formal adult education; (iii) preparation and adaptation of training materials; (iv) holding the parent-child story books reading sessions, where Roma parents (mainly mothers) read to their children book stories and the facilitator helps them discuss the early childhood education and care issues raised in the books; (v) disseminating children's story books for home reading among the target parents; (vi) keeping portfolios of the beneficiaries including data on the beneficiaries' attendance, learning progress and other relevant information; and (vii) monitoring the implementation of the activity by designated project staff member/s.
- Provision of writing skills training (**phase 2**) approaching and involving Roma parents (mainly mothers) of preschool and school-age children in need of writing skills training; (ii) selecting and training facilitators; (iii) preparation and adaptation of training materials; (iii) provision of writing skills training; (iv) keeping portfolios of the direct beneficiaries including data on their attendance, learning progress and other relevant information; and (v) monitoring the implementation of the activity by designated project staff member/s.
- Provision of training in various school subjects and social communication skills (**phase 3**) such as math and literature, aims to further develop the targeted parents' education and make them better prepared to assist their children with their homework. A further consequence of the low education of the target parents (mainly mothers) is that many of them are with poor social communication skills and unaware of the skills and knowledge the preschool and school expects from children as well as their and their children's rights and how to access them (e.g., accessing social benefits and services the parents and their children are entitled to, accessing health care and protection from violence, etc.). Empowering mothers and improving their parental skills and competences can significantly contribute to their children's early childhood development.