

ROMA EDUCATION FUND

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHTS

2023 - 2033

BUILDING **RESILIENT** ROMA
COMMUNITIES THROUGH
EDUCATION

READ NOW



NEW MISSION AND THEORY OF CHANGE

The long-term mission of the organization is to increase the resilience of Roma communities in the face of social, economic, environmental, and political changes and crises through education. On the one hand, resilience will be the result of higher competitiveness in the process of digital and green economic transition as well as greater stability of income. On the other hand, a wider and collectively organized pool of highly skilled public leaders and managers will be ready and able to have sufficient influence on public institutions to protect the interests of Roma communities when it comes to public investment and to provide protection in times of transition and crises.

In this process, the role of REF will be to leverage innovative education methods, digital technologies and research to provide new and alternative education models that respond to the demands of digital and green economies and to scale these up through strong public communications, partnerships, fundraising and policy advocacy.

REF's work will be rooted in the argument that Roma, the youngest ethnic community in Europe, are a part of the solution for European economies.[1] The World Bank has already produced potent data-based arguments that the employment of Roma could bring immense economic benefits to their countries. Based on these arguments, programs supporting education and employability of Roma are cases of public investment, not public spending.

[1\] HTTPS://WWW.ALJAZEERA.COM/OPINIONS/2023/5/22/WHY-EUROPE-NEEDS-ROMA-TO-DRIVE-ITS-ECONOMY.](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/5/22/why-europe-needs-roma-to-drive-its-economy)

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NEW VISION OF **REF**

The vision of the organization is to create a supportive environment for every child, young person and parent with whom REF works, empowering them to develop personal resilience in rapidly changing societies. Our aim is to instill confidence and a sense of belonging, and to encourage active participation within their communities while emphasizing the importance of education as a catalyst for growth and development.

In this context, the role of the new REF is to:

- Model alternative methodologies for enhancing social and educational competences of children at the levels lower than university education.
- Model the employability of Roma individuals, especially by targeting the parents of the children and youth REF works with in order to facilitate their access to jobs that are in demand in the labor markets.
- By using convincing evidence showing their effectiveness, scale up such model interventions, either by building partnerships and fundraising for implementation at a larger scale by REF itself or by influencing public institutions to do this.
- Develop future Roma leaders, experts and managers to support the above objectives as well as broader Roma advocacy.

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NEW **VALUES**

LOYALTY

INNOVATION

NIMBLENESS

KNOWLEDGE

SELFLESSNESS

REF VALUES ARE **LINKS** THAT CONNECT ROMA COMMUNITIES WITH EDUCATIONAL SETUPS DESIGNED TO INCREASE THE RESILIENCE OF THE ROMA.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF REF'S STRATEGIC AND ORGANIZATIONAL ADAPTATION **#1**

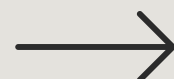
Our mission statement will evolve from “to contribute to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma” to “Education for Roma community resilience”. This approach creates a mindset of looking at educational outcomes not in isolation but rather as measures of progress for the wider community in the face of multiple crises and societal transitions.

For increased impact across diverse contexts, REF will become a Center for innovation that applies new methods and digital technologies to connect Roma communities with current possibilities and trends in education and employment. The Covid-19 pandemic and the necessity of home schooling has made it imperative for REF to understand and properly leverage technology so that it becomes a source of strength for Roma children and parents rather than a vulnerability.

Relatedly, the new REF will have to be a data-driven organization. Our interventions will need to be informed by knowledge and research based on state-of-the-art analytical tools. In this way, we will avoid wasting funds based on anecdotal or insufficient evidence of impact and efficiency.

In order to multiply our efforts and investments, the Roma University Scholarships Program will be significantly redesigned. It will focus on students' career development and public engagement for positive change in Roma communities. They will be supported in developing competences and skills as part of Roma movements rather than as disconnected individuals.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF REF'S STRATEGIC AND ORGANIZATIONAL ADAPTATION **#2**

In order to capitalize on crucial, and so far underutilized, capacities for the promotion of resilience in Roma communities, REF will ensure that all interventions promote gender equality and nurture Romani girls' and women's public engagement and leadership development.

Several research studies have highlighted the correlation between a healthy level of ethnic pride and good educational outcomes. The promotion and use of Roma language, history and culture needs to become part of our efforts to nurture the next generations of educated Roma. Building pride, self-esteem, confidence and a sense of belonging among future generations of Roma leaders and advocates is key to improving the situation of Roma communities.

REF cannot accomplish its objectives alone. Being part of the network of the Open Society Foundations will add fundamental value to REF's new strategic approach. Through OSF—and the new Roma Foundation for Europe that will take over OSF's work on Roma, including its role vis-à-vis REF—we will have a much higher advocacy capacity. This has already been demonstrated through nurturing constructive relationships with the government of Serbia, the European Commission and other stakeholders as well as through access to the international media, as, for example, in the case of the recent Al Jazeera article. The Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative brings to the network important new capacities in the domain of economics and entrepreneurship, while the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture is the most recognized Roma-led institution when it comes to Roma history and language teaching. The network will be a space where REF alumni can work, make use of their knowledge, contribute, grow and lead.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF REF'S STRATEGIC AND ORGANIZATIONAL ADAPTATION **#3**

It is crucial to recognize that Roma communities are widespread throughout Europe, and educational interventions aimed at improving their outcomes and promoting social inclusion should not be limited to specific regions or countries. However, during the four-year pilot period, REF interventions should prioritize Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and locations where we can leverage the capacity of the wider new Roma Foundation for Europe network. Additionally, neighbouring countries like Ukraine, contingent upon the stabilization of the ongoing conflict, might open significant funding opportunities and relevance for our engagement.

During the pilot period, REF entities and operations will be strengthened in Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and potentially Slovakia. After the pilot period concludes, additional national entities may be established.

While the geographic focus in terms of countries will be guided by the considerations mentioned above, our focus in developing model educational services (including alternative educational institutions), assistance programs, policy advocacy and research should be directed towards the most relevant Roma communities across Europe, from which efforts can be extended to the national level and beyond, in coordination with the forthcoming Roma Foundation for Europe and other key actors.

We should build on REF's good experiences to further improve engagement and ownership by Roma families and communities. Community members will be involved as partners in our commitment to educational development and building resilience. Those engaged in our activities, therefore, will also contribute their own resources (time, labour, financial, in-kind) to our mutual commitments.

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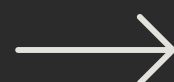


COMMITMENT TO

BUILDING RESILIENT ROMA COMMUNITY THROUGH EDUCATION

During the implementation of the strategy, it is important that REF's Board of Directors remains committed to a continuous process of reflection and evaluation. As flexibility and responsiveness are at the core of REF's approach, it is essential for the board to regularly assess the strategy within the context of the European societies' ever-evolving social, economic and political dynamics. This will enable REF to navigate the turbulent waters of change and effectively address the socio-economic and political hurdles that impact not only Roma but also the broader population.

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REF'S PRIORITIES 2024 -2027

1 - EDUCATION FOR ROMA COMMUNITIES' RESILIENCE, FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND DIGNITY

- Investing in long term qualitative educational support in Roma communities with the purpose of raising the educational performances for all, using new technologies, methods, and setups.
- Promoting through different educational tools the Roma dignity, culture, and history in partnership with ERIAC.
- Establishing permanent Roma Educational Hubs within Roma communities to address the educational needs and foster the development of Roma students.

2 - EDUCATION FOR JOBS OF THE FUTURE

- Investing in education for the future (digital learning, AI, technology) in Roma communities.
- Developing educational methodologies adapted to the Roma communities and providing qualitative educational support.
- Supporting vocational training for adults based on jobs shortage analysis.
- Supporting tertial education and executive trainings for jobs in our target communities.
- Investing in education for entrepreneurship in partnership with REDI.
- Connecting the professional Roma with the labor market and assisting them to obtain jobs.

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REF'S PRIORITIES 2024-2027

3 - EDUCATION FOR ROMA FUTURE AND LEADERSHIP

- Supporting tertiary and expert education for strengthening the existing Roma leadership network and preparing future leaders.
- Establishing an alumni platform for Roma individuals who have received support in tertiary and executive education.

4 - EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Investing in education for Roma community public engagement, civic responsibility and interaction with the authorities (states) and other groups (social, ethnic groups) in partnership with Roma for Democracy.
- Organizing interethnic socializing and creative study camps.
- Promoting the use of e-democracy and engagement through technology.

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REF'S MAJOR INTERVENTIONS

EDUCATION IN ROMA COMMUNITIES



Kindergarten support and accessibility

Parenting support and cohesion

Digital skills and innovative engagement

Roma identity and culture

Sports and healthy lifestyle

Alternative educational programs and support

Gymnasium support and accessibility

All support given to age 0-6 (parenting, digital, Roma identity and culture, sports and healthy lifestyle) adapted to the age category, alternative educational programs and support.

Counselling and orientation for future career (education planning)

High-school support and accessibility

All support given to age 6-14 (parenting, digital, Roma identity and culture, sports and healthy lifestyle) adapted to the age category, alternative educational programs and support.

Higher education support and accessibility (including preparatory summer schools to access universities)

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REF'S MAJOR INTERVENTIONS

HIGH SCHOOL AND VOCATIONAL SUPPORT



Limited scholarship scheme for those leaving their communities for high school or vocational education.

Develop a network of the supported students (alumni)

Digital and economic education

Summer camps and civic engagement

UNIVERSITY (BA) AND EXECUTIVE PROGRAMS SUPPORT



Career planning and counseling

Limited scholarship scheme to support Roma students to access and succeed in universities.

Limited scholarship support for engaged Roma to access executive programs of universities or companies.

Adult vocational training qualifications

Social networks of Roma students, engagement in civic and voluntary activities (alumni)

Summer camps and identity

Digital and economic skills support

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REF'S MAJOR

INTERVENTIONS

EXCELLENCE (POST-GRADUATES, MASTER, PHD)



Limited scholarship scheme to support excellence for engagement and proactive contributions by students to Roma communities' development

Social networks of Roma students, engagement in civic and voluntary activities (*alumni*)

EMPLOYABILITY



Use resources invested in education with the purpose to transit to employment

Offer support for employment, establish cooperation with specialized institutions to place our students and community members in jobs

Adapt the vocational training to local markets, ensure skills evaluation and lifelong learning

RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION



Local interventions are based on baseline analyses and periodic progress assessments

REF will use social and political science methodologies to continuously understand the local realities and challenges of Roma communities in relation to access to education and community resilience

SCALE-UP AND PUBLIC POLICIES



Advocacy

Public communication

Assistance to central and local authorities to improve their systems and accessibility for Roma students

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ROMA **MOVEMENT NETWORK**

ANOTHER REF'S MAJOR INTERVENTION IS FOCUSED ON SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING HUMAN CAPITAL FOR ROMA LEADERSHIP, EXPERTISE AND REPRESENTATION

WORKING CLOSELY WITH OUR PARTNERS:

RFE - ROMA FOUNDATION FOR EUROPE

ERIAC - EUROPEAN ROMA INSTITUTE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

REDI - ROMA ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

RFD - ROMA FOR DEMOCRACY

