External Evaluation

Impact Evaluation of Roma Education Fund

Evaluation Report

Helsinki, 27 October 2012

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Table of Content

TABLE OF CONTENT .................................................................................................................. 2
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS ............................................................................ 4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ............................................................................................................. 5
1 INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................................... 9
  1.1 ROMA EDUCATION FUND (REF) ..................................................................................... 9
  1.2 PURPOSE AND APPROACH OF THIS EVALUATION ..................................................... 11
  1.3 EDUCATIONAL GAPS .................................................................................................. 12
  1.4 INDICATORS ................................................................................................................ 13
  1.5 EVALUATION SCOPE AND CRITERIA ....................................................................... 15
  1.6 METHODOLOGY ......................................................................................................... 16
  1.7 MAJOR LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION ............................................................. 18
2 GENERAL FINDINGS ........................................................................................................... 19
3 ON-LINE SURVEY ................................................................................................................ 20
4 PROJECT SUPPORT PROGRAMME ...................................................................................... 23
  4.1 FINDINGS ......................................................................................................................... 23
  4.2 CONCLUSIONS: PROJECT SUPPORT PROGRAMME .................................................. 31
5 SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME .............................................................................................. 35
  5.1 FINDINGS ....................................................................................................................... 35
  5.2 CONCLUSIONS ............................................................................................................. 37
6 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING ....................................................... 39
  6.1 FINDINGS ....................................................................................................................... 39
  6.2 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................... 43
7 COMMUNICATION AND CROSS-COUNTRY LEARNING .................................................. 44
  7.1 FINDINGS ....................................................................................................................... 44
  7.2 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................... 45
8 REIMBURSABLE GRANTS ..................................................................................................... 45
  8.1 FINDINGS ....................................................................................................................... 45
  8.2 CONCLUSIONS ............................................................................................................. 46
9 GOOD START PROJECT ....................................................................................................... 47
10 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS ................................................................................................. 48
  10.1 CONCLUSION WITH REGARD TO KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS .......................... 48
  10.2 COMPARISON OF PROGRAMMES .............................................................................. 50
11 RECOMMENDATIONS ........................................................................................................ 52
  11.1 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ................................................................................ 52
  11.2 GRANTS PROGRAMME ............................................................................................... 54
  11.3 SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME ..................................................................................... 54
  11.4 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING ............................................. 55
  11.5 CROSS-COUNTRY LEARNING ................................................................................... 55
  11.6 REIMBURSABLE GRANT PROGRAMME ....................................................................... 55
12 ACKNOWLEDGMENT .......................................................................................................... 56
ANNEX:

1. Indicator Matrix
2. List of projects visited
3. Guidelines for Semi-structured Interview
4. Checklist for focus group discussions
5. On-line survey 1: Implementing organisations, donors, government
6. On-line survey 2: REF Board
7. Project assessment template
8. Programme assessment template
9. Documents consulted
10. Persons consulted
# List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGS</td>
<td>Access to Quality Services for Roma Children, “Good Start”-project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEE</td>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDEFOP</td>
<td>European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECEC</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education and Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESF</td>
<td>European Social Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVZ</td>
<td>Foundation &quot;Remembrance, Responsibility and Future&quot; (Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Grade Point Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAP</td>
<td>Local Action Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHP</td>
<td>Law and Humanities Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoES</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD/DAC</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Development and Development/ Development Assistance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSF</td>
<td>Open Society Foundations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDF</td>
<td>Professional Development Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCM</td>
<td>Project Cycle Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBM</td>
<td>Results Based Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REF</td>
<td>Roma Education Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMUSP</td>
<td>Roma Memorial University Scholarship Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RISP</td>
<td>Roma International Scholarship Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ToR</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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</table>
Executive Summary

The Roma Education Fund (REF) was established by the Open Society Foundation (OSF) and the World Bank in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005. Its mission and ultimate goal is to close the educational gap between Roma and non-Roma. In order to achieve this goal, the organization supports policies and programs which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems through the following programmes and projects:

- Project Support Programme
- Scholarship Programme
- Policy Development and Capacity Building Programme
- Communication and Cross Country Learning Programme
- Reimbursable Grant Programme
- The ‘A Good Start’ project in Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide an understanding of the impact, gaps and challenges of the Roma Education Fund (REF). The evaluation aims to analyze:

(a) How and to what degree REF’s work has resulted in changes in law, policy or practice designed to increase access to education and improved educational outcomes?
(b) To what degree has REF’s work contributed to measurable, increased access to education and improved educational outcomes of Roma?
(c) Which of the five Programme areas, instruments and approaches are most effective in contributing to REF’s mission objectives?
(d) How effective and relevant has REF’s policy advocacy work been in furthering its mission objectives?
(e) How can REF strengthen its impact?

According to REF reports, more than 340,000 people have benefited from REF activities. During the evaluation period REF supported activities enabled more than 33 000 children to have access to pre-school education, more than 50 000 students to benefit from after-school support and other activities targeted to improve their school performance and to prevent drop-out. Approximately 5 500 students have received scholarships for tertiary education and nearly 200 000 parents have been reached through advocacy and sensitization.

The online survey, which was implemented in all REF countries shows that especially the achievements to create access to education are highly valued, and the impact on education quality and desegregation has also been positively judged. The majority of the respondents (80%) are of the opinion that REF has contributed and achieved considerable results in policy development and capacity building at local and national level. They believed that without REF the situation of Roma would be worse today.

The Project Support Programme has initiated and contributed to significant policy inputs. Successful models have been developed for pre-school education and for primary and secondary education. A good example is the student-mentor program, where Teacher Training Faculty students were engaged to support Roma children. This programme benefited both the Roma students and the teachers-to-be. The Grant Programme has also contributed to the capacity development of civil society organizations. A significant number
of NGOs (most of them Roma NGOs) have benefited from the capacity development efforts and project planning support provided by REF Country Facilitators and other REF staff.

The scholarships provided by REF are very effective in giving a life-changing chance to individuals, which later return contribution to the development of their community. They are very effectively contributing to changing attitudes and behaviors towards Roma among the general public. The beneficiary interviews and the data collected underline that financial support, combined with mentoring and tutorship contributed most to increased numbers of Roma in tertiary education. However, there were also concerns whether the long-term strategy of establishing a Roma Elite is a sufficient measure to achieve the REF objectives of closing the educational gaps between Roma and non-Roma. To show better results in short-term it was proposed that support should also be targeted to students in rural and very disadvantaged areas also at secondary and high school level.

With regards to desegregation significant changes (both positive and negative) have occurred during the period 2008 – 2012. The reduction of Roma children in segregated schools in Serbia for example, has dropped from 32% in 2008 to approximately 6% in 2012. A negative impact is for instance, that some projects experienced that some non-Roma parents withdrew their children from schools because Roma children were enrolled there.

Significant work has been made at policy level by initiating and developing polices to support closing the educational gaps between Roma and non-Roma. REF has provided research data and support to policy implementation, but the use of research data in policy development seems still limited. The evaluation suggests that a more participatory approach to identify research areas and the development of utilization-focused dissemination strategies could improve the use of research data.

The evaluation team found that the Communication and Cross-country learning programme is relevant to some extent but its effectiveness and efficiency could be improved if opportunities for cross-country learning were opened to the implementing partners and countries, and if lessons learned were more efficiently disseminated within REF. REF might need to redesign the programme in order to make sure that it clearly contributes to the REF goals and that it has a positive impact on improving projects and programmes in addition to the knowledge transfer between REF staff.

Reimbursable Grants Program provides support to Roma NGOs in accessing EU Structural Funds and other associated funds. Without these funds many NGOs would not apply for ESF projects or would not be able to bridge the payments for project activities. The programme is delivering much required and appreciated services to NGOs. The weaknesses influencing this programme are outside of REF’s sphere of authority.

In general, REF has made sustainable impacts in education system through its policy work and through Grant projects, producing new models to support access and better educational outcomes for Roma students, as well as desegregation. Impacts at individual level are obvious. Impacts are also made at mezzo-level, many organizations and communities have changed their way of work and included new activities as a result of projects financed by REF. There is clear evidence that impacts are made at macro level in promoting policies within the education system. But, a more programmatic and results-oriented way would improve targeting the resources and facilitate the monitoring of achievements and the
programmes as a whole. Comprehensive needs assessments are desirable to ensure better targeting projects.

All project staff, parents and students confirmed that REF has provided valuable input. Good results are reported in learning outcomes and in school attendance. There are also cases where marks have gone down regardless of intensive support, but the evaluators believe that this is resulted from external factors beyond the project's control.

The financial sustainability of all programmes is a concern. Most of the activities depend fully on external financing and in most cases Governments do not contribute to them. The work must be carried out using other funding sources or as volunteer work.

The general findings of this evaluation combined with the independent ratings by the evaluators according to the OECD/ DAC criteria show that the Project Grant Programme, Scholarship Programme and Policy Development and Capacity Building are the most relevant programs of REF and have significant impact in reducing the education gaps between Roma and non-Roma. These programs form the core of the REF activities. The Communication and Cross-country Learning programme in turn has appeared less relevant, and its impact is difficult to verify. The Reimbursable Grants programme cannot be assessed using the same criteria like the other programmes, and therefore cannot be compared.

Based on the evaluation results REF should continue and even further enhance its attempts to close the educational gap between Roma and non-Roma, as this shows very good results and contributes significant to REF's reputation. Further, REF should continue supporting development of models and good practices in partnership with educational institutions, Roma representatives and NGOs, and disseminate the good examples within the country and in the region.

REF should take into consideration to define Programme level overall objective and programme level monitoring indicators for its core programmes (Project Support Programme, Scholarship programme, Policy Development and Capacity Building Programme as well as Communication and Cross-Country Learning Programme). REF should also introduce a more participatory country strategy development process and review its Monitoring & Evaluation Systems.

In order to make impacts more sustainable, REF should provide support to projects applying multiple strategies (direct support, piloting, policy development, capacity building, advocacy, etc) and address access, quality and desegregation in parallel. There is clear evidence that such approach provides better and more sustainable results.

Application and selection procedures should be simplified and made more transparent. Though REF has made efforts to publish eligibility criteria, names of scholarship beneficiaries and members of the selection committees as well as project grantees, the evaluation learned that there is still space to improve information dissemination and that the criteria for disbursing funds should be revised and made available to all stakeholders. Transparency of Project Grant selection could also be improved by using a standard rating scale.

For REF it is crucial to further strengthen its own capacity and its position as an education fund by building networks of knowledgeable and experienced education experts, to engage in substantiated dialogue with national authorities and other partners at both country and
international level. Establishment of country offices and more human resources at country level would be essential for achieving this. Better visibility of its work and the results achieved would considerably strengthen REF’s role as a credible development partner and provide leverage in policy reforms. Thereby REF could play a stronger role in donor coordination and harmonization of initiatives targeting Roma education.

The Project Support programme achieved good results with regards to access. This could be strengthened by increasing the support to projects aiming at quality of education by improving curriculum, teaching methods, and establishing and maintaining quality standards in education. At the same time, changing perceptions among parents (both Roma and non-Roma), teachers as well as children themselves about education and strengthening Roma identity should be introduced as a crosscutting theme in all activities financed.

Desegregation should remain in the centre of the REF agenda. Segregation should further be targeted at the level of legislation and national policies as well as at school level. REF should consider expanding legislative support to the most vulnerable communities.

Ways to better coordination within the REF Scholarship Programme and the use of complementarities with other programmes should be explored. Further, the scholarship programme should put more focus on applicants that live in rural and peri-urban areas, who experience difficult socio-economic conditions. To increase the amount of scholarship to a single student, especially for the poor students and make it more country specific (meeting actual needs to cover the living) would add to the already attractive programme.

Cross-Country Learning Programme could better support capacity and policy development or should become a component of it. The experiences and positive practices, the successful models created in different Roma Decade countries, and the results of the research conducted or supported by REF could be better disseminated to education institutions and NGOs in this way.
1 Introduction

1.1 Roma Education Fund (REF)

The REF’s mission is to promote Roma inclusion in all aspects of the national education systems of countries participating in the Decade of Roma inclusion, as well as other countries wishing to join this effort and to reduce the educational gaps between Romani and non-Romani children. In order to achieve this, the organization supports policies and programmes (a) promoting access to education for Romani children at all levels of education, (b) promoting quality education and better learning outcomes of Romani children, and (c) reducing segregation of Romani children in education systems. REF has been created to spur changes in government policies and programmes, build upon the lessons learned from successful interventions and pilot programs, and disseminate knowledge on issues affecting Roma in education.

The Fund was established by the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the World Bank (WB) in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005. Present donors include OSF, the World Bank, the Austrian, British, Finnish, German, Spanish, Swedish, and Swiss governments; private companies such as Putumayo World Music; foundations such as the Network of European Foundations, the World Bank Community Fund, Tempus Foundation Hungary, and the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future (EVZ) as well as several individuals. In addition, funding is received from the European Commission and the Romanian Structural Funds-Management Authority.

REF provides assistance to 16 Roma Decade countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

The allocation of funds across the countries is based on a set of criteria: the size of Roma population, the percentage of Roma population in the country and the GNA (gross national average) of the country. The Board keeps the flexibility to re-allocate funds in the second part of the year based on the demand and priority area of the countries; the availability of EU funds, strategic intervention, and building of cooperation with governments to scale up educational programmes.

With regard to the number of Roma per country (which is usually estimated), the relatively biggest support per capita was provided to Moldova and the smallest to Croatia. In the majority of countries the support ranges from EUR 1.5 – 9.2 per person (except Moldova that obviously stands out). The budget per country is presented below.
Table 1: Total expenses of REF CH and REF HU by Country 2008-2012 (1.1.2008 - 1.6.2012) for all REF programs and administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Code</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Roma Population</th>
<th>Cost per Roma (EUR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ALB</td>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>213 722</td>
<td>601,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 BOS</td>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>100 229</td>
<td>451,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 BUL</td>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>966 303</td>
<td>4 815,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 CRO</td>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1 065 500</td>
<td>59,164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 CZE</td>
<td></td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1 051 366</td>
<td>513,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 HUN</td>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>9,511 378</td>
<td>2 552 549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 KOS</td>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>119 098</td>
<td>367,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 MAC</td>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1 591 450</td>
<td>4 815,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 MNE</td>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1 201 426</td>
<td>2 500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 MOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1 021 426</td>
<td>179,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 ROM</td>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2 051 201</td>
<td>2 500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 RUS</td>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>57 811</td>
<td>508,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 SER</td>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>59 167</td>
<td>508,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 SLK</td>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>149 084</td>
<td>508,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 UKR</td>
<td></td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>144 917</td>
<td>508,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 UNR*</td>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1 381 180</td>
<td>1 381 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 TUR</td>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1 200 201</td>
<td>1 200 201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 SPA</td>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1 345 323</td>
<td>1 345 323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 INT</td>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1 677 558</td>
<td>1 677 558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 UNR</td>
<td></td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1 547 301</td>
<td>1 547 301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6 049 250</td>
<td>3 092 330</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Unrestricted line (UNR) includes the entire general administration of REF operation and all program related coordination, which doesn’t link to any specific country

The organization supports policies and programmes, which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems through five major programmes and the EU financed Good Start programme:

1. Project Support Programme
2. Scholarship Programme
3. Policy Development and Capacity Building Programme
4. Communication and Cross Country Learning Programme
5. Reimbursable Grant Programme
6. ‘A Good Start’ project (in Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia only).
The average annual budget of REF during the evaluation period was 6.7 million EUR\(^1\). The budget saw an increase every year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: REF budget per Programme 2008 -2012 (in 1000 Euro)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1 Project Support Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 Scholarship Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 Policy Development and Capacity Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3 Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5 Reimbursable Grant Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Start AGS (incl. LEGO, BVL, FSG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demjan project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REF RO Capacity Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: REF data received 3.10.2012

In 2010 the REF Board approved the strategy for the period 2010 – 2015. According to this strategy REF will maintain the five programme areas mentioned above. It will also become more involved in implementing projects of significant size through the use of government funding, including Structural Funds. In accordance with this strategy REF has established a branch in Romania and plans to set up offices in two more countries by 2015. The scholarship programmes will be adjusted to increase the number of scholarships and university graduates by providing additional support to tackle the causes of high drop-out, especially in the first year of study. REF will also continue to expand its policy development and capacity building to identify and disseminate lessons of experience and good practice. Important areas of development are also ensuring successful transition of Roma students from one stage of education to the next and monitoring and evaluation. The strategy also sets quantifiable targets for the four programmes:

a) Reach 70,000 children a year through its grant programme (P1).

b) Support 1,000 students in tertiary education in 14 countries (P2).

c) Publish 4 major policy studies and evaluations which influence European and national policy per year (P3).

d) Increase the leveraging ration of the Revolving fund to 10:1 (P4).

**1.2 Purpose and Approach of this Evaluation**

The first external evaluation of REF was conducted in 2008. This evaluation addressed organizational issues. Now, four years later, REF and some of its main donors have

\(^1\) Not including 2012.
commissioned this evaluation to assess the impact of REF’s interventions. In accordance with the Terms of Reference (ToR) the evaluation will identify where REF has contributed to the reform of government law, policy and practice, whether improvements in educational outcomes can be directly attributed to these reforms, and which instruments and approaches of REF were most effective for reaching its mission objectives. The main questions of interest of this evaluation are:

1. How and to what degree has REF’s work\(^2\) resulted in changes in law, policy or practice designed to increase access to education and improved educational outcomes for Roma across Europe?
2. To what degree has REF’s work contributed to measurable, increased access to education or improved educational outcomes for Roma in reality?
3. How effective and relevant has REF’s policy advocacy work been in furthering its mission objectives?
4. Which of the five Programme areas noted above are most and least effective in contributing to REF’s mission objectives?
5. How can REF strengthen its impact?

This evaluation covers REF work in four countries of the Decade of Roma Inclusion: Albania, Hungary, Romania and Serbia. These countries were selected in accordance with the requirements presented in the ToR and approved by the evaluation committee.

In addition, an online survey to assess the impact was administered in the other 15 countries of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The timeframe of activities included in the evaluation is January 1, 2008 to June 1, 2012. The primary audience for this evaluation comprises the REF Board, REF senior management, REF’s long-standing donors, and potential REF donors.

### 1.3 Educational Gaps

Data on Roma in education at national levels does not exist. However, research and analysis has been performed by key stakeholders that provided insight in educational gaps between Roma Children and non-Roma. Below we highlight the educational gaps between Roma and non-Roma based on the document review of publications from various organizations (e.g. REF, OSF, UNICEF, World Bank, UNDP).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1: Educational Gaps between Roma and non-Roma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Preschool coverage for Roma children in South-Eastern Europe is lower than for the majority population. Participation rate of 13.5 % among Roma children age three to five.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Primary school enrolment rates for Roma are lower than for non-Roma. 62 % of Roma aged three to sixteen do not attend schools or kindergartens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Roma children participation in secondary school is lower than that of the majority population. In South-Eastern Europe, only 18 % attend secondary school, compared with 75 with the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) REF’s work in this document refers to policy work done directly by REF staff as well as such work funded through its grant Program that is specifically related to policy.
majority community.
- Less than 1% of Roma continue on to higher education.
- Drop-out for Roma population is higher than for non-Roma. Roma students are 30 times more likely to abandon school than the rest of the population.
- Primary school completion is less common for Roma than majority population. Two out-of-three Roma do not complete primary school, as compared with one in seven in majority communities.
- Educational achievement among Roma is lower than for non-Roma students coming from similar socio-economic situation.
- Roma Children are under-represented in special education. A third of students enrolled in Special Schools are Roma children and that a third of Roma children attend segregated education in Special Schools or Roma-majority schools.
- There are significant disparities on enrolment and quality of education for Roma between rural and urban areas.
- There is a strong gender-biased dimension. The primary enrolment rate for Roma girls is 64%, compared to 96% for girls in non-Roma communities of similar socio-economic conditions.
- Roma children face negative assumptions and stereotypes about the intellectual inferiority.
- School-going Roma children receive less support in their homework compared to their peers of majority population.
- High level of illiteracy and high unemployment among Roma results in living in extreme poverty, which impedes them from education.

1.4 Indicators

REF tracks its performance using nine key performance indicators:

1. Participation in pre-school education
2. Prevention of early school leaving
3. Completion of upper secondary education
4. Participation in tertiary education
5. Parental participation in children’s education
6. Desegregation
7. Prevention/reversal of enrolment in Special education
8. In-service teacher training
9. Roma Employed by REF-funded projects

In addition to these indicators this evaluation developed a set of indicators to be used to track the achievements and impacts of the Programmes (see annex 1).

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3 In 2011 Annual Report this indicator has been changed to “Higher Education Graduates”.
4 In the 2011 Annual Report, this indicator has been spitted into two: (a) Ratio (number) of Romani pupils enrolled in segregated compulsory education settings (base value in 2011 was 7,283) and (b) Ratio (number) of Romani pupils enrolled in special education (base value 2011 was 503). These indicators are not included in this evaluation as because follow-up data is not yet available.
## Box 2: Roma Education Fund objectives and indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>REF Objective</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **ACCESS**             | **Pre-school Education**                                                      | - Number of Roma children age 0-7 participated in REF activities 2008-2012 (all projects/ target regions/ schools)  
- Number and % of children of general population age 0-7 participating in pre-school in 2007/2008 - 2011/2012 in municipalities of selected projects  
- Number and % of children of Roma children age 0-7 participating in pre-school in 2007/2008 - 2011/2012 in municipalities of selected projects  |
|                        | **Compulsory Education**                                                      | - Total number of Roma children age 7-14 targeted by REF 2008-2012.  
- Number and % of children of general population attending compulsory basic education in 2007/2008 - 2011/2012 in municipalities of selected primary school project/s  
- Number and % of Roma children attending compulsory basic education in 2007/2008 - 2011/2012  
- Number and % of Roma children age 7-14 participating in integrated primary schools in 2007/2008 - 2011/2012 in target regions/ municipalities of selected REF projects  
- Number of Roma children 7-14 in segregated classes/schools in 2007/2008 and in 2011/2012 in target regions/ municipalities of selected REF projects  
- Number of REF supported Roma children attending compulsory basic education 2008-2012  
- Number of children in Second Chance schools supported by REF in 2008-2012 |
|                        | Increasing access to secondary, post-secondary and adult education, for example through scholarships, adult literacy courses and career advice for secondary school students. | - Upper Secondary School (age group 14-18)  
- Secondary school completion rate of Roma supported by REF annually 2008-2012  
- Number and type of different support with respective number of beneficiaries supported by REF 2008-2012 |
| **QUALITY OF EDUCATION** | Projects which aim at Improving the quality of education, for example, through curriculum reform, introduction of Roma language teaching, anti-bias and tolerance teaching, and training of school mediators by providing inputs such as additional support to Roma students and schools with an objective to prevent drop-out and improving learning outcomes. | - Number of teachers trained and type of training provided by REF 2008-2012  
- Number of mentors and other support staff trained  
- Number of students benefiting from quality inputs (Afternoon classes, tutorials etc.)  
- School attendance of Roma children who were supported by REF (in selected projects) 2008-2012  
- Transitions rate of Roma pupils receiving REF support in selected projects 2008-2012  
- Quantitative results on national tests of general population/ Quantitative results on national tests of Roma supported by REF  
- End year results of Roma pupils receiving REF support in selected projects |
| **DESEGREGATION**      | Projects which address integration of Roma students from segregated schools and classrooms and from special schools into mainstream schools as well as eliminating all segregated classes and schools. | - Number of Roma children who have been integrated to ethnically mixed primary schools from Special Schools as a result of REF activities annually 2008-2012  
- Number of Roma children enrolled in Special Schools  
- Number of special classes closed as a result of REF activities (Roma Decade Indicator) 2008-2012  
- Number of grade 1 Roma students enrolled in special schools 2007/2008 and 2011/2012  
- Number of pupils who have been transferred from “Roma schools” to ethnically mixed primary schools as a result of REF activities 2008-2012  
- Percentage of Roma attending “Roma schools” (regular primary schools with over 50% of Roma pupils) in 2007/2008 and 2011/2012 |
| **POLICY DEVELOPMENT; AWARENESS RAISING AND CAPACITY** | Policy development and Capacity Building (P3) | - Number and types of inputs (e.g. studies) produced.  
- Number of references in policies and strategies.  
- REF inputs to policy development and strategy processes  
- Number of REF supported pilot projects scaling-up.  
- Funds to support Roma communities and NGOs in capacity building.  
- Number of beneficiaries and beneficiary organizations.  
- Roma employment within REF projects part-time/ full-time (REF |
1.5 Evaluation Scope and Criteria

The ToR indicated that the evaluation should select countries, which represent different amount of support provided; EU member states and candidate countries, and non EU countries and countries with different number and density of Romani population. Using this criterion, the Team proposed Albania, Hungary, Romania and Serbia as a subject for field research. In addition to these countries, the following countries were included in the on-line survey: Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Kosovo, Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine, and Russia. The evaluation covered period 1.1. 2008 – 1.6.2012. This proposal was accepted by the REF Board and donors.

The evaluation criteria by Organization for Economic Co-operation / Development Assistance Committee (OECD/ DAC) were used as a general framework for this evaluation. These criteria are relevance, effectiveness (or efficacy), efficiency, impact, and sustainability. The evaluation criteria and questions are presented in a table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Evaluation Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>The extent to which the intervention is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor.</td>
<td>Are the programmes in tune with the policies and priorities of the partner country government, Roma Decade and REF?  Are relevant strategies, programmes and interventions selected to address the identified educational needs and gaps? Do they address and eliminate the main causes of the problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness (Efficacy)</td>
<td>A measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives.</td>
<td>To what extent have the stated objectives been achieved?  What are the factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of objectives? What have been the most effective strategies for results to be achieved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Efficiency measures the outputs -- qualitative and quantitative -- in relation to the inputs</td>
<td>Has delivering the development assistance been efficient?  Is there any evidence whether the same or better results might have been achieved through different means?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>The positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.</td>
<td>What has happened as a result of the project/programme? What real difference has the activity made to the beneficiaries? To what extent can identified impacts and changes be attributed to the intervention? What would have occurred without the intervention?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn.</td>
<td>To what extent do the benefits of a programme or project continue after donor funding ceased? What can be done to ensure sustainability of the development outcomes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.6 Methodology

The evaluations used a combination of evaluation methods: desk review of relevant documents, primary and secondary data analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and quantitative sociological questionnaires. The process and methodology was agreed with the REF Board members and the staff in country. The stakeholders to be consulted were grouped into:

- National and local government officials and national education and other institutions with responsibility for Roma issues;
- International and national partners and NGOs active in the area of Roma inclusion, particularly representatives of Roma civil society organizations and networks;
- Project implementing partners
- Direct beneficiaries (pupils/students, parents, teachers, and others)
- REF country coordinator and facilitator

Data Collection

A set of data collection instruments was developed. They included (a) semi-structured interviews for donors, implementers, stakeholders and REF staff; (ii) checklist for focus discussions; (iii) on-line survey questionnaire to implementers, donors and government representatives in all Decade countries; (iv) on-line questionnaire to the REF Board members and Board members of Hungary foundation; (v) Project assessment template and (vi) Programme assessment template (Annex 3-8).

The evaluator team collected quantitative data in all four countries for school year 2007/08 as a baseline and for 2011/12 using different data sources: (a) national education statistics disaggregated by general population and Roma population (as far as available), (b) statistics from localities where the REF financed projects were implemented (as far as available) and (c) from the projects (reports and interviews). This triangulation was used to validate the data. However, gathering data was a cumbersome task and it was difficult in some countries or even impossible to establish sound data-base or follow-up data which can show the true situation of Roma in the education system or the impacts of the REF in a broader education context. This is due to the fact that ethnic data is not or only partially collected.

The existing policy and legislative framework as well as the REF Country Assessments of the four countries were analyzed. Official statistical data at national and local level were used where available. However, as indicated above in countries where ethnic data is not collected baselines were established through triangulation of data in project documents, through interviews and local statistics. In addition, available reports and research papers were consulted as well as documents related to their strategies provided by REF, country priorities and assessments. List of reference documents is provided in the Annex 9.

An on-line survey questionnaire was sent to 617 e-mail addresses provided by REF. The response rate was excellent, slightly over 30%. In addition, an on-line questionnaire was sent to the Board members.

Field Research
Field Research was carried out in Albania, Hungary, Romania and Serbia. The Field Research included conducting semi structured interviews and focus group discussions with the REF Coordinators, project implementers, beneficiaries, Roma associations, and other stakeholders. The Team also collected data on REF indicators. A sample of projects in the four countries was selected using the database of “Approved projects 2006 – 2012” which is available in the REF-webpage\(^6\) using the following criteria:

- **Time:** On-going projects during the evaluation period 1.1.2008 – 1.6.2012.
- **Education level:** Projects addressing pre-school education, primary education, secondary, tertiary, adult education were included in the sample.
- **Objectives:** Projects which have an implicit objective to improve access to education, desegregation and education quality improvement.
- **Implementing partner:** Projects which were implemented by civil society organization by public institution (government institution, education institution, etc), international NGO and joint initiatives.
- **Grant amount:** Projects of different size: less than 50 000 €, 50 000 – 100 000 €, more than 100 000 €.
- **Geographical coverage:** Urban and rural (underdeveloped) and wider range of municipalities

The same methodology was applied in all four countries. However, in case of Serbia all sub-projects under SER020 and SER045 were targeted as a cluster as they all have the same objectives, target group, approach and more or less similar budget. Such approach enabled better assessment of the project impact in different municipalities and potential provide better insight and lessons learned as to the effects of the project strategy and approach in various conditions.

A tentative list of projects was presented to the REF Board for approval. It was slightly modified and it was agreed by the evaluators to include an analysis of the Good Start project in this evaluation although it was not originally included in the ToR. The list of projects included in the sample is presented in Annex 2.

Semi-structured individual and group interviews with Key Stakeholder were implemented with special focus on a) the impacts of REF in reducing the educational gaps of Roma; b) impact of REF supported actions on policy and capacity development, service delivery, spread of promising practices, cross-regional knowledge sharing, and other related issues; and, c) and explore ways how the REF can strengthen its impact. The team consulted a total number of 16 implementing organizations of Grant projects and interviewed more than 370 individuals representing beneficiaries, donor organizations, implementing agencies, and REF staff. The list of individuals interviewed and number of informants per category is annexed in this report (Annex 11).

A total number of 23 focal group discussions were held with beneficiaries (children, parents, students). These discussions allowed a broader and more open-ended discussion and insight in (a) the problems of Roma education and the support provided by the REF projects in

\(^6\) [http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/ref-approved-projects](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/ref-approved-projects)
overcoming them; (b) assessment of the impacts of REF projects at individual level and (c) the sustainability of the project outcomes.

Each of the five REF programmes was evaluated independently, using the common OECD/DAC Evaluation criteria. The work was divided into six steps with specific outputs as presented below.

Figure 1: Work Process

1.7 Major limitations of the evaluation

In most Decade countries the educational authorities do not (as they are not allowed by law) collect ethnically disaggregated data and many projects did not keep distinct statistics about the project history. Thus, data were collected from the REF reports, NGO reports, from parents and other sources. Most education authorities reported that the information such as the year passing rate of beneficiaries or the school drop-out cases, compared to information regarding the total of the school population, were not available. Gender specific data were also rarely available. An overall Logical Frame (or Result Framework) for the entire REF, which was mentioned in the Terms of Reference does not exist.

The TOR indicated that country selection should result in an evaluation that accurately reflects REF’s work as a whole. Although selection of countries and sampling of projects were done in a systemic manner, it is obvious that every country is unique by nature and it is not possible to establish a sample of countries which would accurately reflect REF’s work as a whole. Thus the findings from the four countries should be considered a proxy to indicate actual changes.

There are also some reservations concerning the validity of the findings, as they are based on a limited numbers of informants. The team cannot be certain that those were truly representing all the stakeholders. Thus the results of these interviews cannot be extrapolated to the entire beneficiary population. In order to validate the findings, the team used several data sources.
The timing wasn’t appropriate in all countries; especially for Serbia since the new Government has just been established after the spring elections and the changes in the public administration were still on-going. Further, several REF projects of key importance are not finalized yet and consequently were not taken into consideration for analysis. In order to get an in-depth understanding of each programme implemented by REF would have required more time. The Team had to focus on programmes with a potential on making an impact on the access, quality, desegregation and policy development.

2 General Findings

The number of beneficiaries in the last four years has increased significantly compared to the first three years of REF. According to REF reports, more than 340,000 people have benefited from REF activities compared to 91,000 during the previous period. Annually, an average of 50,000 parents have been addressed and engaged in project activities, and an average number of 13,000 students have benefited from REF support services. A significant increase in the number of beneficiaries is observed in all indicators compared to the previous period 2005-2007 (even though comparison is not even as the previous period was one year shorter than the evaluation period).

Table 3: REF’s nine Grant programme indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Number of beneficiaries 2008-2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Participation in pre-school education</td>
<td>8 063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Prevention of early school leaving</td>
<td>8 373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Completion of upper secondary education</td>
<td>8 762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Participation in tertiary education</td>
<td>1 321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Parental participation in children’s education</td>
<td>49 391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Desegregation</td>
<td>5 287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Prevention/reversal of enrolment in Special education</td>
<td>878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 In-service teacher training</td>
<td>7 546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Roma Employed by REF-funded projects</td>
<td>1 514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 135</td>
<td>30 378</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: REF Annual Reports 2008-2011

7 This is a cumulative figure and it may also include beneficiaries who have been counted under more than one indicators (e.g. enrolment and desegregation)
8 Data for all indicators is not yet available.
9 2012 data is not available/comparable at this stage.
10 Includes beneficiaries of Good Start project (AGS)
11 In 2011 Annual Report this indicator has been changed to “Higher Education Graduates”.
12 In the 2011 Annual Report, this indicator has been spitted into two: (a) Ratio (number) of Romani pupils enrolled in segregated compulsory education settings (7,283) and (b) Ratio (number) of Romani pupils enrolled in special education (503). These indicators are not included in the table xxx because follow-up data is not yet available.
3 On-line Survey

The online survey was composed to provide the perceived valuation of the impact REF has produced over the last 4 years, and to offer a larger number of addressees the option to voice their appreciation and table recommendations.

The questionnaire has been sent to 617 e-mail addresses that were provided by the REF. It turned out that only 486 addresses were still valid. Out of 152 responses 148 were valid and could be analyzed. Despite a rather elaborated questionnaire, which took the participants in average 24 minutes to fill in, this gives a response rate of slightly over 30%.

The survey contained 42 – mainly multiple choice – questions, some had several sub-questions, and for some a judgment had to be given on a scale. General questions had to be answered by all participants and some questions were tailored for specific stakeholder groups.

The responses came from 20 countries (including 4 donor countries) and were very balance in terms of gender (52% female and 48% male). The most responses (27) came from Serbia. There was a good mix of institutions represented in the responses.

Table 4: Types and numbers of stakeholder responding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Chart</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Ministries</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Government body/agency</td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local (Territorial) Government</td>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donors</td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International NGO</td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma Association (Organization)</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local NGO</td>
<td></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed by REF</td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education institution</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Responses</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>148</strong></td>
<td><strong>148</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Analysis/Perceived REF Impact

The survey results have been analyzed with focus on the perceived impact of the REF programmes. There was no significant difference on the awareness of the respondents regarding projects and programmes.

The survey asked the stakeholders to judge the impact of REF’s programmes. In general, as below table illustrates, the survey showed that the impact of REF’s activities is perceived as very good. If we split the results into the different stakeholder groups (government agencies, donors, international NGOs, Local NGOs and Roma Associations, REF employees, educational institutions) the result is very similar, with exception of international donors, which are more critical, and REF staff and local NGOs and Roma Associations judging it slightly better. About 15% of people responding did not assess the impact.
Figure 2: Perceived impact of REF programmes (on-line survey)

With respect to different aspects of education for Roma the survey provided a set of questions that allow judging the impact of REF’s work on different educational aspects. The responses provided again a very positive picture of the perceived impact. The diagram below shows that especially the aspect of access is very highly valued, and that also impact on aspects of quality and segregation has been positively judged. Similar to the impact of programmes international donors are more critical, where as REF staff and local NGOs and Roma Associations judging it slightly better. About 13% of responses stated that they feel not in the position to judge the impact on educational aspects.

Figure 3: Perceived impact on different educational aspects (on-line survey)
Further, the survey included questions specifically aiming to judge impact at different education levels. The answers to these questions were more diverse, indicating that there is still room for improvement in the field of adult education (which actually has not been in focus of REF), where as the impact on pre-school education is judged as very good. The graph below shows that the perceived impact is smaller as older the targeted beneficiaries are. The local NGOs and the Roma Association clearly valued the inputs and work of REF the highest; where as REF staff and international donors were most critical. But again, the differences are not significant. To judge the impact on different educational levels seems to be rather difficult, over 25% of responses did not judge the impact.

Figure 4: Perceived impact at different education level (on-line survey)

The responses on questions regarding programme/activity alignment present also in a very positive picture. With respect to alignment the international donors clearly judged REF’s efforts even better than the other stakeholders. In general the results are very encouraging, as in reality alignment is very difficult to achieve. Only slightly more than 10% of responses did not judge the alignment.
Figure 5: Perceived quality of REF programme/activity alignment (on-line survey)

4 Project Support Programme

4.1 Findings

The Project Support Programme provides grants for governmental and NGO initiatives at all education levels. Grant applications should be in line with REF’s mission and objectives and should aim at: (a) Helping develop or reform education policies; (b) Piloting and testing Roma educational interventions; (c) Scaling up successful pilots; (d) Mobilizing additional financing; (e) Building the capacity of governments and the civil society; (f) Conducting research and analysis on Roma education issues; (g) Raising awareness and advocacy campaigns; and (h) Promoting the cross-country learning and. The REF has come up to the stage of development that a great number of Grant projects are scale-up projects.

The project selection is a multi-level process, with the involvement of different actors. The eligibility screening is done by Country Facilitators, and the REF Management Committee assesses the proposals and submits them with recommendations to the Board for approval or rejection. The call is open all year round and it is made available in the internet.

There are significant differences in the approval rate of project proposals between countries. Among the countries selected to this evaluation, the highest approval rate was in Serbia (71 %) and Hungary (51 %) while the lowest was in Albania (31 %). Also the number of submitted applications differs. Whereas altogether 91 applications were submitted to REF in Bulgaria, only 51 proposals were submitted in Hungary, which has approximately the same Roma population. In Romania, only 25 applications were submitted during the period evaluated, which is rather a small number compared to the estimate of 2.5 million Roma living in this country. This may indicate different issues, ranging from the number of NGOs that have sufficient capacity to make a good application to the awareness of this funding window.
Table 5: Number of Grant applications, approved projects and approval rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appl.</td>
<td>Appr</td>
<td>Appl.</td>
<td>Appr</td>
<td>Appl.</td>
<td>Appr</td>
<td>Appl.</td>
<td>Appr</td>
<td>Appr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>B &amp; H</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Rep.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval rate</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>47 %</td>
<td>42 %</td>
<td>44 %</td>
<td>42 %</td>
<td>48 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to REF data, the majority of the grant projects are targeted elementary education and early childhood education. This is in accordance with the national education sector plans and priorities set in the REF Country Assessments. The table below shows that Bulgaria has a clear focus on Early Childhood Education, Primary Education and Teacher Education. In other countries the projects are operating equally in all areas, though with increasing focus to early Childhood Education (including pre-school education).

Table 6: Projects per Education level and per country in Decade countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Early Childhood Education</th>
<th>Primary education</th>
<th>Secondary education</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Teacher training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{13}\) In 2008 two cluster projects were approved. SR020 with 16 subprojects and SR045 with 9 subprojects.
In Albania, Hungary, Romania and Serbia a considerable number of beneficiaries has been reached through the Grant Programme. In those countries, a total number of 24,000 children have participated in preschool activities supported by REF, more than 40,000 students have benefited from activities targeted to Basic Education and nearly 25,000 students have benefited from the secondary education programmes. This is a good contribution to reach the REF Strategy 2010-2015 goal of 70,000 children a year through grant programmes in all 11 countries. The number of beneficiaries has increased significantly between years 2005-2007 and 2008/2011 in all countries.

Table 7: Number of Beneficiaries in Albania, Hungary, Romania and Serbia 1.1. 2008 - 1.6.2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>2478</td>
<td>1071</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>6296</td>
<td>11,436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>8108</td>
<td>4794</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>1001</td>
<td>5712</td>
<td>20,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1630</td>
<td>18533</td>
<td>8990</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>4362</td>
<td>34333</td>
<td>67,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>13,369</td>
<td>16700</td>
<td>13956</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>95288</td>
<td>140,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24,081</td>
<td>41,505</td>
<td>24,860</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>6,946</td>
<td>141,329</td>
<td>240,937</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data received from REF 2.10.2012; 26.9.

The Grant projects are of different sizes. From the total number of projects implemented in Albania, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia the budgets of individual projects vary from 4,000 EUR17 to 850,000 EUR. The average duration of the projects is 14 months, ranging from 2 months to 50 months. These projects are implemented by single NGOs, projects implemented by national authorities or International NGOs and partnership projects implemented by NGOs and public authorities. Only one small-scale project in Hungary was implemented directly by a primary school. The purpose of this project was to train the education staff in desegregation.

Findings Regarding Access and Quality of Education

The enrolment of Roma children in the compulsory school (RO 013 project implementation period: July 2006 – August 2008) improved significantly. A significant number of parents are reported to participate in the school councils.

Table 8: Enrolment in RO 013 project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>1287</td>
<td>1384</td>
<td>1541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>3152</td>
<td>3393</td>
<td>3709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents in the School Councils</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14 In case Hungary and Romania this data contains the beneficiaries of the” A Good Start” project as well.
15 Numbers under the early school leaving and desegregation indicator has been added
16 Does not include scholarships
17 The Management Committee approves projects under 20,000 EUR.
In the project RO058 in Romania notable results have been registered in the counseling, informing, tutoring activities which were carried out within the Educational Community Centers for Roma. Unfortunately, there is no precise data available, but it was confirmed by the informants that these activities have contributed actively to reducing school drop-out among Roma pupils, raising school academic performance average of Roma pupils by a minimum of 2 points and school drop-out recovery of Roma pupils. Another notable result of the project is that local and county authorities got involved in the process of implementing the project, which contributes to the sustainability of the project.

In the project RO086 in Romania, after almost one year of intervention and intensive work with the target group a positive trend was identified for the whole target group. The absences in the REF project group were less in September-November 2011 than in the control group (169 for REF group compared to 255 in the control group; the number of absences for the target group is counted for a group of 31 children compared to the control group of 29).

In the project SE032 in Serbia, the number of Roma students continuing their education at colleges and faculties also increased from 31 to 87 students. In the 2007/08 school year the dropout rate was 7.32 %, in the 2008/09 school year the dropout rate was down to 6.37%, and in 2009/2010 it even declined to 2.95%.

In Albania (AL008) school abandonment that has been an exclusive phenomena for Roma/Egyptian (R/E)\textsuperscript{18} pupils is now at minimal levels. Comparing two schools in Korça, one part of the REF project and the other not, it was learned from the teachers that in REF supported schools absences have diminished and the rate of students who successfully complete the year has increased. Also, the average mark in Albanian language and mathematics has increased from one year to the other, while the gap with the Non-Roma students has decreased. The Table below shows the results of two schools in the cities of Korça and Gjirokaster where the REF supported projects were implemented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9: The dynamic of some qualitative indicators in two 9 year schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Asdreni” school Korčë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline 07/08 08/09 09/10 10/11 11/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoning of school (number) 15 2 1 0 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of absences - 42 37 37 35 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cajupi” school, Gjirokastër</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline 07/08 08/09 09/10 10/11 11/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoning of school (number) 12 2 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of absences - 143 81 55 49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Save the Children, 2012

In addition, the number of R/E pupils that continue their studies in high school has increased: Out of 35 R/E children in all REF project schools in Korça and Gjirokastra that completed the 9\textsuperscript{th} grade in June 2011, 54% have continued in high school. In June 2012, out of 37 R/E children that completed school, 67.5% of them continued in professional high school. In the focus group organized with the teachers of “Asdreni” school in Korça, a

\textsuperscript{18} Roma and Egyptians, despite distinctions among them, have the same ethnic heritage and live in Albania for centuries.
director said: “Many girls from R/E community started high schools, both general and professional ones like foreign languages and economics. Compared to the period prior to the project this means that a taboo was broken. There is progress and moving forward”.

Some projects have also exceeded their targets. In the project HU049 in Hungary, the target was to reduce drop-out ratio to 15%. Instead, implementers were able to decrease it into 7.5%. In this project, also the average grade of children enrolled to Tanoda school was upgraded from 2.4 to 2.98. 87% of students continued their studies in secondary education (with no matura) and 6% get accepted to secondary schools with the end receiving matura. In another project (HU 43) all 8th grader students benefiting from mentoring support continued to secondary school (REF Final evaluation repot 2010).

Moreover, in HU23 the 21 coordinators supported 90% of the disadvantaged families, which are approximately 1500 families in the region. As a result, approximately 200 student started to study at the elite school of the settlement, and 30 student was enrolled to elite schools outside of the district, 300 disadvantaged children were enrolled to kindergarten as the result of the programme.

**Findings regarding Desegregation**

With regards to desegregation, significant changes (both positive and negative) have occurred during the period 2008 – 2012. In Serbia, reduction of Roma children in segregated schools has occurred from 32% in 2008 to approximately 6% in 2012 (according to MoES) and is aiming to be further reduced. This is partially definitely due to REF support to the work of Inter-sector commission and control of the enrolment in special schools. Within the project SER017 a total number of 231 Roma children were transferred from special schools to regular schools in 5 localities. The follow-up project has continued with this initiative and included education staff trainings. Still an issue is out-of-schools children that often end up in the schools for adult education when finally reached.

In Hungary, REF provided professional and financial support to local governments in order to help or to start the desegregation through the student-mentor programme. As a result, a segregated special school was closed and students were enrolled in mainstream schools. The project was successful because it directly supported the implementation of the law, there was strong ownership and because the introduction of the student-mentoring occurred at the time when the Teacher Training curricula was renewed. Though the student-mentoring was scaled down after the project financing came to its end, but has continued as small-scale volunteer activity. The model has been now expanded to other REF countries.

However, the same approach did not succeed in the neighbouring municipality where the school was given to the church and continued as a segregated school. The negative and unintended impact of desegregation policy was that several parents withdrew their children from schools when Roma children were enrolled.

In Romania, (RO058) the project’s most important outcome is represented by Ilfov County School Inspectorate and its design and approval of an action plan on reducing the educational gap between Roma and non-Roma, promoting intercultural dialogue and creating an inclusive educational environment within two General Schools. This action plan represents a big step in the process of school desegregation in the two educational units and
also a big step in reducing the educational gap between Roma and non-Roma children in the two localities (RO 058).

Increased number of Roma in schools, changing demographics and non-Roma students pulling out of schools where the proportion of Roma students is high may result in de facto segregation of entire schools. For instance in Korça, Albania, in Roma settlements the number of enrolled children in the nearest school is going up, and is now 50 % of school pupils. Whereas, this is considered to be in accordance with inclusive education principles, which emphasise the child’s right to attend the school nearest their home and community, it also can also creation of “Roma schools”.

**Selected Strategies**

Below we present the most common strategies chosen by Grant projects as described in the list of Approved projects\(^{19}\). This evaluation used the definition by UNICEF (2000)\(^{20}\) for Quality of Education. According to UNICEF Quality Education involves learners, content, processes, environments and its outcomes are usually measured through student success and learning outcomes. Quality education includes:

- **Learners** who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn and who are supported in learning by their families and communities. The quality inputs relate to health and nutrition, early childhood psychosocial development experiences, and family support for learning.

- **Processes** through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities. The quality inputs may include teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, student access to languages used at school or use of mother tongue in education, administrative support and leadership, using technologies, facilities and practices to respond to specific needs of learners etc.

- **Environments** that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities. The inputs relate to quality of school facilities, presence of adequate instructional materials and textbooks, as well as psychosocial elements such as peaceful, safe environments.

- **Content** that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life.

- **Outcomes** that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and community participation, learner confidence and life-long learning, and health outcomes.

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\(^{19}\) http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/ref-approved-projects

The analysis of the strategies shows that the projects have used advocacy, awareness raising and sensitization of parents as most common strategies to *improve access*. In Hungary for instance, a group of coordinators was educated to inform and encourage the parents to enroll their children in mainstream schools.

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21 This list is not exhaustive as all project descriptions did not describe the implementation strategies in detail. However, it highlights the main strategies used to close the educational gaps in the Decade countries. During the field visits it appeared that these descriptions were not comprehensive or informative enough.
The projects applied multiple strategies and *quality inputs* targeted to learners (meals, after school support) and out-of-school educational processes (tutoring, after school support, summer schools). A few projects addressed development of antidiscrimination strategies or multi-ethnic education in schools or issues within the education system and schools. While majority of the quality inputs were out-of-school support, there were also successful examples of projects where for instance mentoring has been taken to classrooms.

All projects, parents and students confirmed that REF has provided a valuable input to their learning and reported several factors, which have contributed to the success of the projects. The reasons for non-achievement were mainly due to external factors like lack of political will and support. In some aspects the achievements were higher than set targets (e.g. learning outcomes in the Scholarship programme). In some cases, the non achievements resulted because of poor capacity of the implementing NGO or insufficient engagement of the actual beneficiaries and target communities in project preparation. Regarding learning outcomes across the projects and students, it was reported that some students are able to improve their GPA significantly with extra support whereas for some students their GPA has gone down. Reasons for this are not known, but it is possible that it related to other factors than schooling alone. The informants identified the following factors behind the achievements:

**Box 5: Factors behind the Achievements**

The main reasons provided by the stakeholders for the achievement of the good results in Grant projects were:

- Dedicated and motivated staff,
- Well designed projects that target real needs,
- REF know-how and constant presence in the field during the project implementation,— not only through monitoring visits but on regular weekly or monthly basis and constant consultations,
- Support provided by REF in the designing phase of the project and availability of international best practices,
- Close coordination with other donor or national initiatives in the same field,
- Roma participation in project implementation (Roma NGOs, Roma beneficiaries, Roma local and international experts) which gave the inside perspective to solving the problems and approaching beneficiary communities,
- Selection of projects that were clearly within national priorities and therefore ensured support and “push” from national and/or local authorities,
- Visible results and benefits for the beneficiaries as well as duty bearers,
- High level of involvement of NGO sector and good cooperation with the public sector in many cases, possibility to compare and have benchmarks in similar projects in other countries.

In addition to the achievements mentioned above, the Grant Programme has also contributed to the capacity development of civil society organizations. A significant number of NGOs (most of them Roma NGOs) has benefited from the capacity development efforts and project planning support provided by the Country Facilitators and REF. This has strengthened their capacity and many of those organizations have been enabled to apply for funds from other sources.
4.2 Conclusions: Project Support Programme

General Conclusions

All the informants confirmed that REF has produced viable results. Most studied projects show improvements in numbers of enrollments. The parents confirmed that without REF support some of their children would not have continued school, and that without afternoon activities the children would spend most of their time on the streets. The evaluators unanimously share the observation that going to school has improved the self-esteem of the children and also promoted their Roma identity.

REF activities are distributed in a balanced way across the countries, between rural and urban areas of regions, areas where Roma live in difficult socio-economic conditions and large Roma communities. However, it remained unclear to what extent the supported projects addressed the actual root causes of out-of-school children, such as in-direct and direct costs of schooling (clothing, books etc.), limited space in schools (it was reported that there is lack of preschools or pre-schools have limited spaces) and school level factors.

A more results-based approach could strengthen the impact of this programme. The programme does not have specific objectives and the areas or themes of the grant projects are broad (and actually cover nearly all REF activities). Therefore, it is difficult to assess the achievement of the objectives of the Programme as a whole. A more programmatic and results-oriented way would also make it easier to target the resources and to monitor the achievements and the programme as a whole.

Conclusions regarding Access and Quality of Education

The analysis of the data and information from the project visits show that significant achievements have been made in promoting access to education. During the evaluation period more than 33 000 children have had access to pre-school education, more than 50 000 students have benefited from after-school support and other activities targeted to improve their school performance and prevent drop-out. The number of students completing secondary school has increased significantly compared to the previous period. Also the number of teachers who have benefited from in-service training has increased up to 1400 in REF financed projects.

The analysis of individual projects showed that successful intervention were the ones targeting, or at least keeping in mind, the whole system and which applied a comprehensive combined approach such as direct support to beneficiaries complemented with mentoring and tutoring. Such comprehensive approach has proven to be the key factor of success. Also, improving access alone would be insufficient for education to contribute fully to the development of the individual and society. This is also noted by the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) which points out that “the achievement of universal participation in education will be fundamentally dependent upon the quality of education available”. Thus, more comprehensive, needs-based approaches would be desirable.

22 see http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/programmes/project-support-programme
Successful models have been developed for pre-school education and for primary and secondary education. A good example is the student-mentor programme, where Teacher Training Faculty students were engaged to support children in the classrooms and after school. In this approach improvements in the performance of the children have been observed and also the student-mentors reported that they learned a lot. In their future work, they will not push the students with support needs “in to the corner”, but they address them first. The student mentors, however, reported that more orientation by school teachers and principals would have been needed so that the role and efforts of the mentor would have been clearer. Engaging them in the early stage of planning and preparation of the programme is crucial.

Advocacy as a means of improving access to education is a relevant strategy indeed, as many of the Roma parents are little educated and need to be motivated to send their children to school. The parents have now sensitized. However, in focus group discussion in Hungary half of the parents claimed that they can’t support their children, because they have insufficient literacy. This justified the need for having after school activities to support students in their homework.

Based on our assessments we believe that the quality of education will not be sustained without institutionalizing the support measures (e.g. mentoring, tutoring, after school support) that are provided through REF projects now. For instance introduction of new innovations and measures such as Pedagogical Assistants (Serbia) are very effective, but not sustainable unless financing is secured. In addition to developing new models, the REF supported projects should seek ways to put existing resources to use within the school system (e.g. in Serbia there are psychologists and pedagogues and Professional Development centres). Good quality inputs and adequate teacher policies which will ensure standard teaching in all school are needed.

REF should apply a broader concept of Quality of Education and provide support to various elements of it. For instance REF could increase efforts to ensure that pedagogical measures, which can be used in the mixed classrooms, are encouraged and teachers are trained in such. These include, among others, team teaching (two parallel teachers in the classrooms), flexible grouping NOT based on ethnicity (for example the new Finnish curriculum framework extended the approach of pedagogical grouping of students into smaller groups based on interests, motivation, curriculum content, abilities, targets). Also integrating Roma issues in induction of new teachers and mentoring could be an efficient measure. If REF would like to have more impact on classroom practises, it has to support efforts there. This kind of interventions would, however need projects with a duration of more than one year. Experience shows that three year projects are a suitable period to show some results. REF should also explore whether student-mentoring could be part of the community services within the Scholarship schemes, the evaluators are convinced that there are students who are willing to participate in community work and volunteering.

With regard to desegregation the positive example from Hungary demonstrates that projects can be successful if they directly support the implementation of the law and if there is strong ownership.
Measures to address discrimination and prejudice (in both Roma and majority population) as well as changing perceptions among parents (both Roma and non-Roma), teachers as well as children themselves about education and strengthening Roma identity should be a crosscutting theme of all REF financed activities. Other areas that should get more attention in the future are quality of Roma education, support in policy development (e.g. on desegregation, anti-discrimination, out-of-school children, affirmative measures, etc), building capacities of School Authorities to evaluate, monitor and support inclusive education, tailor made support to schools to implement inclusive education and Capacity Development of teachers, required changes in basic (pre-service) teacher’s training curriculum, monitoring of achievements, mainstreaming of mentorship, different approach and more work with parent and in particular mothers, focus on ECD and Roma preparedness for education, drop-out preventive measures, preserving cultural identity early in the education process, and promotion of activism among young Roma. In addition, through the grant projects REF has generated a vast knowledge base which could be used in targeting policy makers and general public.

Conclusions regarding desegregation

Support measures are needed to ensure that segregation is not created and that students have proper opportunities to learning. The figure below illustrates that going to a school nearest to Roma settlements may result to segregation and poor learning outcomes due to several factors. Similarly, enrolling a Roma child in a mainstream school far from her/his home may also result to segregation and poor learning outcomes. Without well targeted and good quality support to the child and to the school there is not much option for the children to learn. Therefore, REF could broaden its inputs to teacher training (in-service and pre-service), to introducing Roma issues in the curricula, developing materials in Romani language and supplementary materials for general curriculum, and supporting the entire school in non-discrimination.

Figure 6: Potential negative influence of access and segregation
Desegregation, where it has been attempted, has frequently faced resistance from both the majority communities and the staff of schools. This is due to prejudices and beliefs that including children with special educational needs in a classroom – whether Roma or other reasons – will have negative effects in the quality of education. The fact that Roma schools do not get sufficient resources and get less qualified teachers than other schools does support this view.

Segregation in Specials Schools is also a quality issue. For instance in Serbian Special Schools students study curricula in accordance with a particular type of disability and different subjects than students in regular schools. As a result of this, it is difficult for the students to make transfers from Special Schools to regular school. Also, majority of teachers in Special Schools are trained in defectology rather than pedagogies and they are not specialized in the subjects taught. Further, it is observed (e.g. OSF, REF) that working in a segregated school is not attractive for teachers. Therefore it is easier to get employed in a segregated school and less qualified teachers apply. In addition it has been forwarded that authorities tend to make less investments in those schools resulting in poor facilities and less instructional materials and equipment.

This evaluation concludes that the project assessment and selection processes are well established, but also observed that significant issues such as sustainability are not addressed sufficiently during the application or assessment procedures. Also the introduction of a simple scoring system should be introduced to make the selection process more straightforward and transparent. It was also observed that the Board is engaged in making decisions on all projects (apart the ones with budget less than 20,000) which is time consuming. To improve this, REF could consider of simplifying the decision making processes so that more time of the Board could be used for strategic and coordination issues. Systematic baseline analysis and needs assessment could be improved, this would help in better targeting the projects. In case of the selected projects it was evident that there was a good insight in real needs of the target groups, and that the projects met those needs. But there were still questions whether more targeted actions would be needed to the neediest ones to reduce the education gap between Roma and non-Roma. For example, the secondary scholarship programme and mentoring is linked to students’ success and attendance and is therefore much more oriented towards supporting dedicated, good students than being just a “social measure”. The review of the project applications and assessments made by the Management Committee indicates that supporting NGOs in establishing partnerships with schools and enhancing their capacities in education related issues would contribute to the relevance and quality of projects. Few NGOs are experts in education issues and pedagogies.

Though majority of the projects visited by the evaluators were initiated by REF, the fund could still be more proactive, for instance in promoting partnerships between NGOs and schools. This was also recommended in by the previous evaluation (2008): “In order to make sustainable impacts at school level, REF should stimulate and support cooperation and partnership between the grantees and schools. Schools and NGOs have usually complementary skills: Whereas schools do not have capacity to develop a project, they have

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23 A rapid problem analysis of the Special School system in Serbia (Venäläinen February 2010).
trained pedagogical staff and NGOS might have this project preparation capacity and deep understanding about Roma issues. Bringing these partners together can create synergic effect. Involvement of the school can also substantially increase the sustainability of the project outcomes. Carefully planned participatory approach facilitated by REF can also serve mutual multi-cultural understanding and change of attitudes and prejudices”. To achieve this, targeted efforts to establishment of network of models schools in partnership with Roma NGOs and schools would be useful.

Finally, our observation goes in line with a conclusion made at the World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain in 1994: “Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system -- “an inclusive education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive – in other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities.”

5 Scholarship Programme

5.1 Findings

REF Scholarship Programme is designed to facilitate access for Roma youth to tertiary education and to enable larger number of Roma to take visible positions in society. The aim of the programme is to help talented and socially committed young Roma to acquire a university education, to become part of an international network of well-educated Roma and to give them the skills needed to represent the interests of Roma in society. To promote this, REF stimulates community work by the grantees and interaction between them through various platforms (such as student conferences, Yahoo-groups). As an example, the LHP beneficiaries can apply for funds (2,500 EUR) and implement small-scale projects in Roma communities.

Four scholarship schemes are available on a yearly basis: Roma Memorial University Scholarship Programme (RMUSP)24 Law and Humanities Programme (LHP)25, Roma International Scholar Programme (RISP)26, and Roma Health Scholarship Programme (RHSP)27. Complementary, the beneficiaries of RMUSP and LHP are eligible for the

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24 The Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP) offers merit-based open competition academic scholarships for Roma students pursuing Bachelor, Master, or PhD degrees at state-accredited universities in their home country or country of residence.

25 Law and Humanities Program (LHP) offers merit-based open competition academic scholarships for full-time Roma students pursuing Bachelor, Master, or PhD degrees at state-accredited universities in their home country or country of residence.

26 Roma International Scholar Program (RISP) offers merit-based open competition academic partial scholarships to full-time Roma students pursuing Bachelor, Master, PhD degrees, or Postdoctoral education at a state-accredited university outside of their home country or their country of residence.

27 Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP) offers merit-based open competition academic scholarships for full-time Roma students pursuing or seeking to pursue Medical Education in order to attain degrees of Medical Nurses and Medical doctors at state-accredited Medical Universities or Medical-vocation schools in their home country or country of residence.
Professional Development Fund (PDF)\(^{28}\), while the beneficiaries of RHSP are eligible for Conference Participation and Language Tutoring Grant. The Programme has been providing support to Romani students of 13 countries of Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe.

The RMUSP provides grants to students in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Turkey. RISP provides grants to same countries and in addition to Moldova Russia and Ukraine. Roma Health Scholarship Programme (RHSP) offers merit-based open competition academic scholarships for Roma students, citizens of Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Serbia. LHP is specifically targeted to Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine.

Applicants must acknowledge being Roma and demonstrate interest in Roma issues by actively participating in Roma related projects. Scholarships are awarded for tertiary education and study towards Bachelor’s, Master’s and PhD. Scholarships at the vocational level are eligible for consideration under the Roma Health Scholarship Programme. The RMUSP grant 80 EUR per academic month and for LHP 130 EUR per academic month (2012). The scholarships shall be used to cover tuition, textbooks, exam fees and partially living expenses. Call for applications are published in the internet and it is available in English and in all country languages. Some respondents doubted whether this information reaches all potential applicants in rural villages and poor communities.

Selection of scholars from the pool of applicants is carried out by a National Selection Board (NSB), the selection process consists of several phases. A quota per country for the RMUSP and LHP has been set based on a combination of factors. Among these are the estimated Roma population ratio per country, availability of affirmative measures in tertiary education, and accessibility of alternative student/loan funds of the potential applicant pool. The minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) that applicants should have in order to be selected for the scholarship depends on the competition of each year. In the Romanian ESF funded project the GPA was as high as 8. To promote transparency, the REF publishes the list of grantees and members of National Selection Committees on their webpage.

REF Annual Reports show that the number of beneficiaries supported by REF Scholarship programme has nearly doubled from 2005 -2012. The evaluator team learned that gender disaggregated data is not systematically analyzed for each programme and some of the data below is collected manually by REF. The data was provided to the evaluators to analyze the trends in numbers of applications and awarded grants between male and female students. This data shows that in all programmes, except RISP, are more female applicants than male, which to a certain extent is also reflected in the approval percentages. This data also shows that LHP approval ratio is much higher than for other programmes.

During period 2008 – 2012 REF awarded a total number of 5452 scholarships. Majority of them were awarded under RMUSP programme (4369; 80 %). The number of applications has increased steadily for all Scholarship Programmes. In 2012, the RMUSP received nearly 1 800 applications. Similarly the number of the LHP applications has more than doubled during the evaluation period being nearly 200 in 2012.

\(^{28}\) Professional Development Fund Conference Participation and Language Tutoring Grant were not analyzed in this evaluation.
Table 10: Number of applications and awarded grants by gender and approval rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Applied</th>
<th>Approved</th>
<th>Approval rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total M/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMUSP</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>4,531</td>
<td>8,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHP</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHSP</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RISP</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,317</td>
<td>5,456</td>
<td>9,773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: REF data sent 2.10.2012

In 2011, majority of the scholarships were awarded to students in social sciences (29 %), natural sciences and engineering (16 %) and humanities (15 %). Scholarships targeted to education and pedagogy accounted for 15% as well. An initiative has been made by REF to attract funds for scholarships targeting specifically students for education and pedagogy, due to increasing numbers of Roma teachers demanded policy priorities in the Albania Country Assessment and the Roma Social Inclusion Strategy.

5.2 Conclusions

Scholarships are very effective in giving a life-changing chance to individuals, which can latter return their contribution to the community, to REF and to the cause of bettering Roma situation.

Most of the beneficiaries of the Scholarship Programme originate from urban areas, where main Roma NGOs operate and where information is easily available. This was also confirmed by the grantees who were interviewed. There has also concern been raised that the scholarship programmes are designed for those, who could anyhow afford to study (even without the scholarship) and therefore the scholarships are not directed towards the youth most in need. Further, it is obvious that not all students in the remote areas do have easy access to information on scholarships and often have little knowledge on how to apply. By introducing a new item on social background in the application, REF tries to analyze whether a special category of needs-based scholarships or other mechanisms are needed.

Efforts are made to promote Roma identity among the scholarship students to create a Roma intellectual elite. This requires good results of students, their retention as well as developing awareness of their civic role and cultural identity. In that respect scholarship programmes that provide multiple support (in addition to finances) shows higher efficacy. An advocacy component is also recognized as important input by the participants, country coordinators and NGOs. The evaluation concludes that in addition to the financial inputs and tracking the numbers of scholarships, REF should also follow-up the quality aspects as developing human capital is a prerequisite to build Roma elite.

The respondents also frequently pointed out that supporting students through mentoring and scholarships already at secondary and high school level is important so that more students would be eligible to apply to tertiary education. This is particularly the case in Albania. Unlike other countries of the Roma Decade, secondary education is not very popular by Roma students in Albania. Secondary sources show that during the school year
2011-2012, 35-40 Roma pupils were registered in secondary education. This shows that the basis, which generates future candidates for university education is rather thin.

REF uses the number and proportion of returning applicants (applicants who apply for second and third year) as an indicator to track the progress and performance of the students. It was learned that tracing the number of students who apply for grants year after year is to some extent a relevant indicator. It has been reported that scholarship has a cumulative effect, if grantees are supported for more than two consecutive years are more likely to graduate. The interviews in Serbia also found that students tend to drop out at later stage of their studies. The assessment also shows that the largest drop-out is among the freshmen pool (60% dropout). The evaluations suggest the REF to study this issue more in depth.

A new measure to track student progress and outcomes of the scholarship programmes is developed under the RSF project in Romania. In this project the scholarship recipients are required to submit their graduation report to REF. How well this works, remains to be seen. As mentioned, the evaluator team learned that gender disaggregated data is not systematically analyzed for each programme. REF should introduce clear guideline for the collection of gender-disaggregated data.

In order to achieve its objective of “creating Roma intellectual elite able to contribute for the community’s socio economic development” REF must overcome several obstacles. First, there is a narrow basis in the high schools from where potential candidates originate, which requires more motivation and financial support. Secondly, the size of scholarship (if we suppose that poor individuals will benefit from it) does not meet the needs of the poorest population as it does not cover daily living expenses. Third, Roma students should be helped step by step during the whole cycle of their studies. Furthermore, from the qualitative point of view the creation of Roma intellectual elite requires the set-up of networks and associations that are strictly connected with the community and strengthen their identity. Consequently the achievement of this REF goal is not related simply to the increase in number of given scholarships, but also by creating conducive conditions. Given that the REF Goal is to reduce educational gaps between Roma and non Roma, the REF has to consider whether the “creating a Roma elite” is a sufficient strategy or if additional measures are required, e.g. targeting to the most needy ones.

The evaluation found that the majority of the students financed by the REF Scholarship Programme are selecting social sciences (with prevailing political and law sciences) that provide limited perspective in the labour market later. The students may also choose programmes that will enable them to work abroad. Because the communities needs professionals in the areas of education and healthcare the REF could earmark some scholarships to these areas to attract competent Roma professionals who would serve as role models close to the Roma communities. In addition, supporting students to become teachers would have multiple effects both within the Roma community and in the education system as a whole. Qualified Roma teachers in the education system will promote a positive image of Roma in mainstream schools. Counselling Roma students when making their career choices would be beneficiary to achieve the desired impact.
The scholarship programmes are very effectively contributing to changing attitudes and behaviours towards Roma among the general public. Participation of Romani students in tertiary education is also changing the image of Roma. Some students pointed out that it is important to develop more opportunities for young Roma and Non-Roma to meet and communicate in annual conferences or alumni work. This would help to overcome a lot of stereotypes. REF could explore opportunities to engage scholarship students as student-mentors for the beneficiaries of the Grant projects.

It may be helpful to review the scholarship schemes on country basis to explore opportunities. For instance in Hungary, the church is providing huge scholarships that could be combined with the REF schemes. Another opportunity would be to provide scholarships for secondary school students and high school students in vocational streams. The amount of scholarship should be further increased at least for the poorest students.

The beneficiary interviews suggest that financial support, together with mentoring and tutorship contribute to elimination of the main causes of the low rate of Roma in tertiary education. In this sense, RHSP and LHP have much more components that really address the problems and probably RMUSP could be improved in the same way.

Public universities create more chances for integration, professional development and employment chances are better. Consequently, public universities are more cost efficient than the private ones. Despite quality differences among private universities, most of the respondents think that the actual scholarship support must change in favor of public universities, the evaluators support this notion.

6 Policy Development and Capacity Building

6.1 Findings

REF’s Policy Development and Capacity Building Programme coordinates and supports studies, research, technical assistance and training for REF partners and public institutions on policy- and programme-related issues.

Policy Development and Publications

A total number of 24 publications, such as Country Assessments, research reports have been published during the evaluation period 2008 -2012. Country Assessments have been prepared for the following countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia. Research was done for example on the following topics:

- Evaluation of Non-Governmental Desegregation process in Bulgaria (2008);
- Systemic Overrepresentation of Roma in Special Education in Slovakia (2009);
- Analysis of the Impact of Affirmative Action for Roma in High Schools, Vocational Schools, and Universities (2009);
- Assessing Conditional Cash Transfers as a Tool for Reducing the Gap in Education Outcomes between Roma and Non-Roma (2009);
- An Evaluation of the Hungarian National Government’s School Integration Programme (2009); and
- Improving the tools for the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU (2010).

REF has actively participated in policy dialogue in all selected countries. For illustration, in Hungary, REF has intensively been working on commenting the drafts of the Educational Act targeting policy or structural changes 2010-12 and providing feedbacks to the policy makers through discussions and policy papers. During that period, the integration of Roma in public education system was one of the priority policy lines of the Ministry of Education and Science’s new equity policy. The Ministry was very open to cooperate with international organizations and Roma NGOs as well. REF was considered as serious strategic partner of the Ministry and was influential through its projects, researches, communication activities. However after the governmental change many polices and rules, which have developed during that time, have been modified or abolished. The Educational Act has been changed significantly and despite of the efforts REF was not in the position to influence the processes during the last two years.

In addition to national and regional policy work, REF participates also in the dialogue of the European Roma Platform, which is a good opportunity to bring Roma education at the top of the agenda. REF has also provided an input and feedback on EU Member State’s Frameworks for National Roma Integration Strategies. In 2011 the European Commission requested all member states to create or update their National Roma Integration Strategies, and aligning them with the Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion and the Europe 2020 reform strategies. REF analysed the documents, sent its comments to the national governments’ bodies in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania and actively participated in discussions. REF also shared its opinions with the relevant European Commission bodies and with the relevant parliamentary groups. The review found that there are significant disconnects between the national strategies, existing legislation and budgets. These disconnects must be addressed to support successful implementation. It is reported that for instance in 2011, REF has participated in nearly 20 international events in Europe and USA.

Most stakeholders are aware about REF’s research work, but the rarely used the documents. Reasons for this were, that they are too broad and do not meet the actual information needs, there is no time to study and that there are overwhelmed with studying/reviewing of documents. The REF Management Committee and Board use a list of country priorities as reference point for decision making. The Evaluation found very little references to REF publications in documents prepared by other organisations.

In Serbia several levels of policy impact were observed: Local level lobbying, cooperation with NGO and technical support resulted in increased inter-sector cooperation, adoption of around 20 Local Plans of Action (LPA) for Roma education, increased budget allocations for Roma education in some municipalities, increased capacities to plan, implement and monitor the results, cooperation with relevant initiatives and projects. The Vojvodina province changed its policy on scholarship support in secondary education and introduced budget line for this purpose. At national level REF has influenced changes in some legislation (e.g. prioritising vulnerable groups in enrolment in pre-school). Policy development and implementation also goes hand in hand with capacity development and in Serbia, the
programmes have also contributed to the capacity development of different stakeholders and education officials (School Inspectors, pedagogical advisors, teachers, MoE staff). What is lacking is support for implementation, monitoring and quality control.

To create Policy impact takes time. For example in Bulgaria, where the desegregation process was initiated by the Roma NGOs (2000), then it was accepted in some Municipalities (2009-2010), and now it is implemented on a national level through the European structural funds and promoted by the Ministry of Education and science. Nobody in Bulgaria remembers that this activity - improving the access to the quality education and decreasing segregation - was first supported with REF and OSF funds. This is a clear example of putting a new policy on the agenda of the government. Last year, around 6 million Euros were budgeted for desegregation activities in Bulgaria, through the European Social Fund, which means that the Government has accepted desegregation of Roma schools as one of its priority areas.

Success of policy work depends to a large extend on external factors. For instance, it has been observed that in many countries policy measures have not been successful because of volatility of the education system in general. Though most Education Ministries have endorsed Roma issues in their agenda, very little action is taken towards it. In some ministries there is limited ownership on this issue and it is not seen as a cross-cutting theme of education. However, during the recent years, e.g. REF Romania has set up a number of policy partnerships and advocacy networks, it has joined advocacy efforts with UNICEF and has been able to win ESF projects with the Romanian MoE as a partner. The results of this cooperation are to be seen.

Capacity Building

A significant number of NGOs have been provided hands-on guidance by the Country Facilitators on project planning and have attended the REF workshops. REF provides technical assistance and capacity building across all its partner countries through its network of Country Facilitators. These are based in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia. In addition to assisting REF grantees at the local level, the country facilitators maintain contacts with relevant government institutions. Country Facilitators provide assistance to the NGOs and public institutions applying for the Grants and also organize trainings for the grantees. They are very committed to their work and their support is very much valued by the recipients.

The need to build the capacities of the NGOs was emphasised by all informants, particularly by the Structural Fund Management Authorities, who pointed out that targeted efforts to build the capacities in Project Cycle Management – needs analysis, project planning, project management, monitoring and reporting – is needed. The team also observed that there are less experienced NGOs who would benefit from initial PCM training so they could take the initial steps for submitting their applications. This was also mentioned as key strategy in the on-line survey for improving the policy impacts. One option could be dividing the support into two types of support: for well established NGOs to push policy reforms and for less established "local" NGOs for grass root initiatives.
Some respondents considered that better regional presence of REF would contribute to better policy impact and capacity development. It was suggested that “there should be one manager in every country (not one for more countries), who will inform about REF support, recommendations and research results more regularly, and who would be a known expert also respected by politicians”.

**REF as a partner**

REF is considered a credible partner and has been invited to comment and provide an input to many national policies and strategies. Majority (80 %) of the respondents of the online survey as well as interviewees from public institutions and development partner community are of the opinion that REF has contributed and achieved considerable results in policy development and capacity building at local and national level. 80 % of the online-survey respondents believed that without REF the situation of Roma would be worsened. REF has provided a necessary input to speed up the preschool and primary school enrolment, without this support the process would have been have been much slower. REF has been most successful in advocacy and policy initiation, and monitoring and evaluation of implementation of policies. REF has also provided research, data and support to policy implementation.

REF has a good reputation among the stakeholders and beneficiaries and the respondents of the on-line survey gave positive feedback on REF’s performance: “We have a very good impression about REF because of the promptitude, involvement and responsibility that they have treat the educational problems from the Roma communities where we interact”. They also indicated that integrating Roma issues with inclusive education approach and developing them in synergy with developing national policies would be influential.

According to the on-line survey results the respondents consider that the three main roles of REF are Donor, advocacy and monitoring of Roma education, and fulfilling the gap in the education sector with regard of Roma education. REF is also seen as a capacity building organization, but surprisingly, very few respondents see REF as a voice of the Roma. The importance of engaging more participatory approaches was also mentioned in some stakeholder and donor interviews.

The following table shows how the stakeholders see REF’s role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12: REF role according to the stakeholder survey</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donor</td>
<td>66 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy, policy development</td>
<td>40 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation Roma education system</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfill demands of the Decade for Roma Inclusion in the education sector</td>
<td>32 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building</td>
<td>22 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing organization</td>
<td>18 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization attracting funds</td>
<td>16 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research organization</td>
<td>12 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channeling voice of beneficiaries</td>
<td>8 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: REF Impact Evaluation on-line survey
6.2 Conclusion

REF’s work has provided inputs in changes of law, policy or practice, to increase access to education and improved educational outcomes for Roma across Europe. Both policy work and capacity building are highly relevant in addressing the educational gaps of the countries, these programmes are consistent with REF overall goals in its attempts to develop evidence-based policies and sharing good practices and lessons learned.

However, the impact of REF publication and policy work remains limited. Based on the feedback from the beneficiaries and stakeholders, for instance government representatives and implementing organizations, the evaluation concludes that especially the research work has not fully reached its audience. Though there is awareness about these publications, they are hardly used. There are several reasons for this. First, developing evidence-based policies is not a tradition in the Decade countries. Secondly, the publications are often too technical and elaborated, and thus not reachable to all. Thirdly, the current research is scattered and often relevant only to very specific domains of education, geographical area, or integration issues.

In order to promote the use of publications in policy making, it would be advisable to engage the potential users – e.g. Government representatives– in identification and design of research, and keep them involved and informed during the research. Many stakeholders would also need support in using and utilizing the findings and recommendation. REF could also consider of establishing partnerships with universities and research institutions to get them involved in their research work.

Though the Country Assessments provide a broad background about the Roma Education in the particular countries, they do not present sufficient framework to position the REF support nor the logic and programme theory, the priorities and selected projects in the education sector development. The Country Assessments would become more proactive documents if there were clear targets for the interventions, and if the analysis would be built on proper analysis of needs and lessons learned. A more strategic and results-oriented approach would also enable to track the achievements and performance at the country level and could also be used as an instrument in policy dialogue. REF should also ensure that all Country Assessments are meeting high quality standards. Making them shorter and more focused will enhance their use.

There is to some extent overlapping on knowledge production among the partners. During the period covered in this evaluation all REF partners – UNICEF, World Bank, UNDP, Open Society Foundation and many other donors have produced information and publications on Roma education in CEE. REF should ensure that it does not duplicate this work and that its publications really fit into its mandate and objectives, and that its research is needs-based. The REF Board, where most of the donors are represented, could be a platform to strategically plan and coordinate the knowledge production domain in Roma Education.

Most Roma NGOs need support in project planning and implementation. In the future, it would be important to widen this opportunity for capacity building to the most

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29 REF’s work in this document refers to policy work done directly by REF staff as well as such work funded through its grant Program that is specifically related to policy.
disadvantaged, least capable organizations. Roma community leaders and NGOs may also need orientation on education development. Cross country and domestic learning between implementing NGOs and other organizations should be promoted.

The role of the Country Facilitators is important as they maintain contacts with counterparts in other countries. There is no network or other media established to enable quick and continuous exchange of experience and contacts. Due to high expectation in the field of policy development REF needs to strengthen its capacities in this field and make more people capacitated and available for research and studies. More senior level education expertise would be needed in REF to develop sound evidence-based policies and strategies and to help in policy dialogue in the Decade countries.

Here some examples of how the stakeholders recommend to increase REF’s policy impact:

- REF should strengthen its research and policy development.
- Improving coordination and harmonization with other partner and donors. REF could share resources with local and international NGOs, also in terms of stronger advocacy. Cooperating more with governmental institutions and coordinate its actions with other Roma education projects.
- Promoting visibility and dissemination. More active and faster promotion of successful pilot practices (or best models).
- Promoting dialogue with policy makers in order to make REF’s outcome more understandable and to help to implement the results into the mainstream.
- Considering establishment of thematic programmes which would include a cadre of projects.

7 Communication and Cross-country learning

7.1 Findings

Communication and Cross-country learning programme is developed for publication and dissemination of information about the work of REF. It includes for instance participation and hosting of study visits organized by CEDEFOP. In addition it includes staff capacity development activities in form of participation in joint monitoring visits. The REF is using a series of communication tools, which includes the organization of conferences, workshops and seminars on specific themes, the publication of articles, web-sites, Annual Reports, Magazine, Brochure and Monthly Briefs, all serving the purposes of cross-country learning.

The number of study visits between representatives of various projects and partner organizations has been increased during 2008 -2012. While in 2008 two study visits took place, in 2011 Hungary and Romania hosted seven visits each. During this period a total number of 20 study visits to project sites took place. A total number of 260 persons participated in those events. Seven visits were organized by CEDEFOP, which has included some REF projects in its catalogue of successful practices.

The on-line survey results show that the Communication and Cross-country learning programme is not known very well and those who are familiar with it were not able to assess
its effectiveness and impacts. It is seen more like an information dissemination activity and internal staff experience exchange programme. The informants found it difficult to identify direct linkages between the REF goals and this programme, and also the comparison of the programmes by the evaluation team members found that this programme is relevant to some extent, particularly if learned lessons are disseminated within REF and between countries. Its effectiveness cannot be assessed, as there are no targets and objectives.

7.2 Conclusion

Cross-country learning programme has provided the REF staff with an opportunity to strengthen its capacities and it has served as platform for experience exchange for various actors. It is in fact more related to advocacy work combined with Capacity Development for the staff. There are some opinions that organizing and hosting a study visit requires (too much time) and resources. Particularly REF Hungary needs to cope with the very large amount of visitors. However, the evaluators believe that the programme has made an impact on activities and results have influenced other organizations and programmes in promoting Roma education.

The evaluation team members found that the Communication and Cross-country Learning Programme is relevant to some extent. However, its effectiveness and efficiency could be improved if lessons learned were more efficiently disseminated within REF and between the implementing partners and countries. REF might need to redesign the programme in order that it clearly contributes to the REF goals, and that in addition to the knowledge transfer between REF staff it also has a positive impact on improving projects and programmes. More, the Programme could become, given the required resources are available, a knowledge management system, much needed by large organisations. This, together with a focused learning programme could contribute to Policy Development and support addressing the educational gaps of the country.

8 Reimbursable Grants

8.1 Findings

Reimbursable Grants Programme provides support to Roma NGOs in accessing EU Structural Funds and other associated funds. An advance payment is provided to organizations having been awarded grants from EU sources, allowing them to start activities before actual financing from respective agencies becomes available. REF is also lobbying the EU and the respective government agencies managing EU funds for procedures that allow NGOs faster access to these funds.

The first reimbursable grants were awarded in 2006. Since then, REF has provided grants to a total number of 34 projects in Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia totaling 556 500 EUR to mobilize 19, 6 million EUR. During the period covered in this evaluation, REF has helped altogether 17 NGOs in Romania (7 projects) and Hungary (10 projects) to mobilize EUR 13,1 million of EU support with REF contribution of 315,716 EUR (115 716 EUR for Hungary, 200 000 EUR for Romania). The average grant for a single project is 18 500 EUR and it accounts approximately 10 % of the total project budget. The volume of the projects
has grown and currently the average Grant for an ESF project in Romania is 97 500, which accounts less than 1 % from the total project budget.

Out of the projects supported 2008 -2012 three projects are waiting for reimbursement, nine projects are under implementation, and five grants have been fully or partially reimbursed. As a comparison, during period 2006 – 2007 a total of 17 projects were supported with a total amount of 435 250 EUR to mobilize a total amount of 1,98 million EUR. Out of those projects, 12 have been fully or partially reimbursed and 5 are waiting for reimbursement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of projects</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total budget – EUR</td>
<td>43992</td>
<td>105000</td>
<td>65000</td>
<td>91724</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>315716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average amount of reimbursable grant per project EUR</td>
<td>10998</td>
<td>35000</td>
<td>32500</td>
<td>13103</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>18571,53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By Country</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Grant Hungary</td>
<td>43192</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>71724</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>115716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Grant Romania</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>105000</td>
<td>65000</td>
<td>20000</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>200000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Grant Hungary</td>
<td>10798</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11954</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Grant Romania</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35000</td>
<td>32500</td>
<td>20000</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>97500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money mobilized Hungary</td>
<td>442544</td>
<td>182116</td>
<td>2263660</td>
<td>715609</td>
<td>11289922</td>
<td>13553582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money mobilized Romania</td>
<td>8986913</td>
<td>1537400</td>
<td>50000</td>
<td>715609</td>
<td>11289922</td>
<td>13553582</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The projects’ descriptions available in the list of approved projects shows that ten projects out of 17 have an explicit objective related to education, seven projects are targeted to income generation and vocational training, and a few projects are dedicated to advocacy.  

REF has also been lobbying for Structural Fund programmes. For instance, in Hungary a call for project proposals for after school support “Tanoda” was opened recently, though with delay. REF has also had many discussions with the National Development Agencies in order to shorten its administrative processes and transfer of financial installments.

8.2 Conclusions

The direct impact of this programme can hardly be assessed. However, it is obvious that if this fund is used to bridge the gap of services provided to the students in need, it can contribute significantly to improved access to education for Roma, desegregation of Roma children, or better learning outcomes.

30 It is noted that the project descriptions are at very general level and may not provide an accurate and comprehensive picture about the projects.
It is not feasible to evaluate the Reimbursable Grant Programme in a same framework as other programmes because it is a very specific programme, which addresses an unforeseen need. It is an “emergency” me, aimed to support organizations, which do not have the capital to start the project because approved funding is delayed. Without those grants, the vast majority of organizations would be in financial difficulties or would not apply for ESF due to a lack of own financial resources. The grant helps the organizations to start with the activities, which is important for instance if the activities are tied with the scholastic year. Delays in starting an after-school support may cause significant and cumulative effects in student enrolment, attendance and furthermore, learning outcomes. This was experienced by a project (HU049), which had to put the project on halt whilst it is now waiting for decision from the National Managing Authorities on a new Tanoda project. Due to this break, there are already indications that some students could drop out.

Without those grants, some organizations could not have applied for ESF, or could even have gone bankrupt. The situation in Romania is shattering as the government has failed to make the payments for a longer period. In this situation, even reimbursable grants cannot help.

9 Good Start project

A Good Start “Scaling-up Access to Quality Services for Young Roma Children (hereafter, A Good Start or AGS) is funded partly by the European Union and the Network of European Foundations. It supports about 4 000 children from ages zero to six/seven to access early childhood education and care services in four countries: Slovakia, Romania, Macedonia and Hungary. The two primary objectives of the Good Start project are to scale-up access to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for disadvantaged Roma children, and to raise early childhood development outcomes for Roma children so as to enhance their school readiness and subsequent life opportunities.

The evaluation reviewed some of the AGS documents and interviewed the REF staff involved in managing the programme in Hungary. There was no opportunity to visit any project sites and consult project beneficiaries and implementing organizations. Thus, its obviously not feasible to make any conclusions or recommendations on the project. However, the evaluators identified some issues which could be of use in the second round of this project and they are presented below:

AGS conducted a baseline survey, including household survey in the potential target communities. This study serves as a baseline study and provides an understanding about the circumstances of the project participants, and information about parental motivations, expectations and behaviour related to education and upbringing of young children. The evaluators welcome this approach, as it is a sound basis for a rigorous impact evaluation. The data should also be used for longitudinal research.31

31 Definition: Longitudinal research is an observational technique that involves studying the same group of individuals over an extended period of time. Data is first collected at the outset of the study, and may then be gathered repeatedly throughout the length of the study. In some cases, longitudinal studies can last several decades.
The lessons learned and the methodological approaches of the baseline study could be further shared with other organizations dealing with ECEC. If possible, simplified methodologies could be developed from this approach and disseminated to the implementing partners across the Decade countries. There is a real need for the partners to learn about methodologies that can be used to assess the needs and establish baselines.

The AGS has adopted a comprehensive approach to ECEC. This is in accordance with the observations of this evaluation, the evaluation found that the comprehensive approach was successful in other REF grant projects. The projects are implemented in very disadvantaged areas, which should be the priority according to the findings of this evaluation. It was learned that there is a project in Serbia targeting Roma mothers that is based on AGS and they have high hopes for the future.

In the future the project could explore what methods could be employed to identify and address special support needs and disabilities. According to the World Report on Disability published by the WHO and World Bank5 – 10 % of any population has some level or nature of disabilities32. Being a Roma with a disability may be a double disadvantage.

Finally, the project has produced a policy document titled “EU Structural Funds and early Childhood Education and Care for marginalized Roma Communities 2014 – 2020” (draft dated May 2012). It includes, among others, cost estimates for some selected countries on how much the dissemination of this Good Start model would cost at national level in certain countries. It is a good starting point for any policy discussion.

10 General Conclusions

10.1 Conclusion with regard to key evaluation questions

This chapter will conclude the key questions asked in the ToR of the evaluation.

How and to what degree has REF’s work resulted in changes in law, policy or practice designed to increase access to education and improved educational outcomes for Roma across Europe?

It is difficult to attribute policy changes to one institution as such changes are the result of an elaborated and extremely complex process. But the in-depth research in the four focus countries as well as the on-line survey attests a significant role to REF.

REF’s know-how, international experience and the piloting of education models and interventions were mainstreamed and integrated into respective regulations. REF has significantly contributed to the promotion of ECEC. REF staff (primarily country facilitators and some of the implementing partners, but also REF experts) participated in public debates and consultations in the process of designing new legislation and regulations and major policy developments across the region REF is active. In some cases REF initiated and/or prepared policy documents as a basis for later/future policy change. In some cases REF successfully lobbied for changes in draft legislation and policies. Another important role REF

played was in capacity building and consultations with implementing partners and
governments. REF participated in conceptualizing and supervising research aiming at
monitoring and/or analysis of Roma and other vulnerable groups participation in education
that provided the basis for policy changes.

To what degree has REF’s work contributed to measurable, increased access to education or
improved educational outcomes for Roma in fact?

Access and improved educational outcomes due to direct support through projects is
definitely the area where REF has strong evidence of direct influence. This is the REF’s work
that is recognized and highly appreciated by all stakeholders. There is sufficient evidence on
regional, national, provincial and local level to say that REF has been highly instrumental to
increased access to education, to a lesser degree to improved educational outcomes.

Again, to attribute a number or level of degree of these improvements is virtually
impossible. But it can clearly be said that REF interventions have been a decisive factor in
making these achievements.

How effective and relevant has REF’s policy advocacy work been in furthering its mission
objectives? How significant is the policy advocacy work in financial terms? How has it been
incorporated into other work supported by REF?

REF policy advocacy work has been seen as highly relevant with regards to REF strategic
priorities and in particular with regards to setting priorities and identifying gaps. The
supported projects/beneficiaries have influenced and reflected priorities as to the education
sector targeted, and programme/project achievements show improvements in all targeted
aspects: access, desegregation and quality.

Based on the data collected by the evaluation team it has proven that the educational gap
between Romani and non-Romani has been narrowed over all, but there are still differences
from country to country.

REF’s advocacy and advocacy efforts of supported projects showed results at local, national
and regional level. However, REF’s advocacy impact could be improved together with its
visibility and willingness to introduce highly participatory processes. Continuation of
cooperation and joint projects with other key donors could strengthen further REF position.
The introduction of even closer cooperation with the NGO sector (e.g. applying together for
EU funding) could further improve its reputation and would provide a even better base for
advocacy work. Finally, REF could start seeking stronger synergy benefits between its key
programmes.

Based on the data, how REF can strengthen its impact?

There are definitely several ways to strengthen REF’s impact. It starts from putting more
finances on the ground, over increase and improve the expertise and knowledge of its staffs,
to the furthering of experience networks and knowledge management.

The review team would recommend to introduce different measures in different countries,
as the context in the region REF is active is quite diverse. Further, different levels (regional,
national and local) need also different measures.
In general the evaluation would see the best chances of improving the impact by increasing the policy work REF is doing, and in fostering the direct cooperation between NGOs and projects with official education institutions. As mentioned above, closer collaboration between REF and NGOs in applying for EU funding would be an other feasible and efficient way of strengthening the impact.

10.2 Comparison of Programmes

The findings of this evaluation combined with the independent ratings by the evaluators programs according to the OECD/ DAC criteria show that the Project Grant Programme, Scholarship Programme and Policy Development and Capacity Building are the most relevant, efficient programmes of REF and which make a significant impact in reducing the education gaps between Roma and non-Roma. These programmes should form the core of the REF activities. Communication and cross-country learning programme in turn has appeared not to be so relevant and also its impacts are difficult to verify. Reimbursable Grants programme is a specific programme which cannot be assessed using all the same criteria than other programmes.

Integrating the Communication and Cross-country programme with the policy development and Capacity Programme would be advisable, as this programme is actually about capacity building, and communication and dissemination are an essential part of the Policy Development. In addition, communication and visibility promotion should be a crosscutting issue for all programmes and projects. Below we present the summary of the scoring and elaborate the assessments.

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**Effectiveness**

The Effectiveness of the Project Support Programme is rated high. At the project level there is clear evidence on the achievements of objectives though there are also some projects with unsatisfactory performance. The programme has also initiated and made some significant policy inputs. However effectiveness could be improved by defining clear short term, medium term and long term objectives for the programme. Effectiveness of the Scholarship Programme is difficult to assess but it is evident that it has contributed and is contributing to the establishment of Roma elite as intended. Some of the REF staff is a good example of this. The cross-country learning has provided some experience exchange opportunities but their effectiveness is difficult to measure. Assessing the effectiveness of Reimbursable Grant programme is not feasible as it is an emergency fund.
**Efficiency**

The Evaluators did not analyse the cost-effectiveness of the programmes. However it is noted that such analysis at the project level could be useful to compare the expenses of various models. Such information about the costs would be a good starting point to policy dialogue. In order to improve the efficiency within REF itself, the evaluation suggests to simplify some procedures and decision making mechanisms. For instance, the analysis of the Board minutes indicated that most of the Board’s time is used on management issues and decision making, which leaves little time for strategy planning and discussion. Also the approval system for scholarships is a resource-demanding task. It seems that more time is used to support an individual applicant than for guiding and monitoring the implementation of the Grant projects.

**Impact**

REF has made sustainable impacts in education system through its policy work and through Grant projects which have produced new models to support access and better educational outcomes for Roma students, as well as desegregation. Impacts at individual level are obvious. Impacts are also made at mezzo-level – many organizations and communities have changed their way of work and included new activities in their operations as a result of projects financed by REF. There is also clear evidence that impacts are made at macro level, in promoting policies within education system.

**Sustainability**

Financial sustainability of all programmes is a concern. Most of the activities depend fully on external financing and as long as the Governments do not contribute to them, the work must be carried out using other funding sources or as volunteer work. Getting a budget line for Roma education is a good start (as in Vojvodina, Serbia) but more lobbying is needed to ensure that funds are also allocated to this purpose. REF has not established any additional structures whose operation will be in danger after external financing comes to its end (excluding Romania Structural Fund office). In the future, REF should refrain of introducing too many innovative models whose sustainability cannot be secured, but rather build on existing structures.
11 Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings the team has prepared a list of recommendations to respond to the evaluation questions. The recommendations are grouped in general recommendations to REF and programme specific recommendations:

11.1 General Recommendations

REF role and approach: REF should maintain its role and attempts to eliminate segregation of Roma in the education system and in closing the educational gaps between Roma and non-Roma. It should try to strengthen its position with regard to policy development and enhance its advocacy role. REF could also play a more prominent role in donor coordination and harmonization of initiatives targeting Roma education. This would improve mobilisation, effectiveness and efficiency of available funds.

Policy development, advocacy, education interventions and scholarships are appropriate measures to achieve REF’s goals. Desegregation should remain in the centre of the REF agenda. REF should actively promote desegregation policies and support sharing of experiences, lessons learned and good examples (e.g. desegregation plans) between the Decade countries and internationally. Segregation should be targeted at the level of legislation and national policies as well as at school level. This could be achieved by developing teachers’ and school authorities’ capacities to manage ethnically mixed classes and by ensuring that sufficient support is available for the children and to the teacher.

REF should contribute to the definition of segregation, and map out measures to eliminate it. Since this phenomenon is closely related to discrimination REF should support promotion of anti-discriminative measures among education staff, majority population and Roma population itself, baring in mind the fact that self-discrimination is equally dangerous.

Programming: REF should define overall programme level objectives for its core programmes. The Cross-country Learning Programme should become a component of Policy Development and Capacity Building Programme (P5). This would enhance more holistic approach and ensure proper learning within the network. REF should also expand the capacity building and cross-country learning to NGOs by providing them an opportunity to experience exchange with similar projects in small scale events.

Monitoring and Evaluation: The REF Monitoring & Evaluation Systems has to be reviewed. One of the current weaknesses is that gender disaggregated data is not collected systematically at all levels. Each core programme should also have programme level monitoring system and indicators. Clear objectives and a comprehensive monitoring system would help in positioning the supported interventions in the broader REF framework and track the achievements and impacts at programme level.

As far as the law permits, REF should contribute to establishment of comprehensive national databases and monitoring systems related to Roma education indicators that is maintained and closely monitored by respective national institution/body in charge of overseeing implementation of national Inclusion and/or Roma related strategies/policies and MoE.
Distribution of Project Grants: The criteria for disbursing funds should be revised so that the investments would be clearly targeted to “reducing the educational gaps” between Roma and non-Roma. REF should also make the criteria for fund allocation public across countries and define the criteria in a more participatory manner, together with relevant stakeholders and national representatives. The criteria should include size of Roma population, based on the poverty rate of Roma (national) and education level of Roma population (e.g. literacy rate). All data for these criteria should be made available in the Country Assessments prepared by REF with the national authorities. REF should use a standard rating system for assessment of project proposals under Project Grant Programme.

Based the evaluation findings, it is recommended that REF continues providing support to projects that apply multiple strategies (direct support, piloting, policy development, capacity building, advocacy, etc.) and address access, quality and desegregation in parallel. There is clear evidence that such approach provides better and more sustainable results. Longer term projects (more than one school year) would be preferable as influencing systems and school development does require more time and students need continuity in support to improve and maintain their success in education.

Scholarship Strategy: The Board needs to define whether a strategy of establishing a Roma Elite is sufficient to close the educational gaps of Roma and non-Roma or if additional measures are needed to address also applicants that experience difficult socio-economic conditions. We are aware that good, sustainable results can be achieved with an elite strategy, but still would like to encourage REF to explore possibilities to include applicants with difficult socio-economic background.

Capacity: REF has to continue strengthening capacities of Roma civil society organizations in an intensive and proactive way with close follow-up. But, as an education fund, REF should strengthen its own capacity by building networks of knowledgeable and experienced education experts that can engage in substantiated dialogue with national authorities and other partners at both country and international level. The establishment of country offices and more human resources at country level would be essential for achieving this. In addition this could be supported by introducing fellowship programme for experienced education experts. REF could explore opportunities of establishing thematic and or regional programmes in areas such as pre-school education, student mentoring, engaging networks of Teacher Training Institutions, etc. that will improve cross country learning.

Visibility and dissemination: REF should improve its visibility and dissemination strategies. This would require more expert staff in country and more in investment in Capacity Building of the existing staff. Also the dissemination work that is done in close cooperation with Decade countries’ policy makers and/or education institutions should be enforced. REF should support development of models and good practices in partnership with educational institutions, Roma representatives and NGOs, and disseminate the good examples within the country and in the region. More promotion and support to the needs-based research, is needed. The experiences and positive practices, successful models created in different Roma Decade countries and the results of the research conducted or supported by REF should be better disseminated to education institutions and NGOs.
Outreach: The outreach of REF work could be improved by announcing calls for both Scholarships and Project Grants publicly in local and Roma language in local media, simplifying application and selection procedures and making the selection criteria and procedures more transparent. We also would like to recommend the possibility of Roma representatives (e.g. alumni) be present in the Selection Boards.

11.2 Grants Programme

Approach: To improve the sustainability of its impact REF should implement targeted projects to Roma population and enforce addressing systemic changes in education. This can be done by collaborating with relevant policy making and education institutions. It is essential that REF supports more joint projects of NGOs and education institutions, and also invests in the education system. Changing perceptions among parents (both Roma and non-Roma), teachers as well as children themselves about education and strengthening Roma identity should be a crosscutting theme of all activities financed by REF.

Scope: REF Programmes should more intensively cover the entire education cycle (from pre-school education to university level), bring to attention education gaps, but at the same time focus on country-specific priorities. In order to close the education gap, programmes should aim at expanding support to the most vulnerable communities with the lowest education level, supporting those communities represent the biggest challenges to the education system and would make a significant impact.

Complementarity: The complementarities of REF projects should be improved to provide coherent and coordinated support to education and that they complement existing national or other donor reform initiatives.

Monitoring and evaluation: In addition to monitoring pf the project performance, there is also a need that children achievements, learning outcomes and progress (transition) through the education system is more closely monitored and followed-up. This would enable better assessment of the programmes’ effectiveness and provide valuable information about strategies that work.

11.3 Scholarship programme

Approach: Financial support should be accompanied with other measures such as tutoring and career guidance.

Complementarity: Scholarship projects should improve coordination and complementarities with other projects and scholarship schemes. To complement the Project Grant Programme REF could look into possibilities of providing REF supported students with the opportunity of internship in some of the REF projects – this would help build their future capacities to influence Roma related policies and strengthen REF’s capacities at the same time.

Follow-up: The setting up a follow-up system for the alumni, which would track not only numbers of beneficiaries, but also quality of education and their achievements until they enter the labour market, would be beneficiary.
Outreach: REF should ensure that applicants that live in rural and peri-urban areas, and who experience difficult socio-economic conditions, have sufficient information and access to scholarships. In order to ensure that information reaches all equally, social networks, teacher and school networks could be engaged in information dissemination.

Amount of financial support: REF should review the financial support to a scholarship student and increase it especially for the poor students and make it more country specific (meeting actual needs for living).

11.4 Policy Development and Capacity Building

Multiple approaches: Capacity building for education system institutions should have multiple approach: a) support to capacity building of policy makers; b) support to quality control and monitoring mechanisms (school inspectors and pedagogical advisors; c) support to the education staff tailor made according to the level of individual institutional development and d) support to pre-service and in-service teacher training.

REF and Structural Funds: Strengthening NGOs capacities could be done by introducing or fostering joint applications of REF and local NGOs for EU structural funds. This would ensure that conflicts of interest and competition with local partners in applying for ESF funds is avoided, and at the same time it would ensure increased capacities for efficient use of ESF. REF should continue supporting the successful partnerships between Roma and Non-Roma NGOs.

11.5 Cross-country learning

Knowledge Management: REF should establish and maintain a Knowledge Management System to allow the better use of the vast amount of information and experience that REF has gathered and produced. This would help to make better use of REF’s own and other internationally available resources and also improve the use of information for policy making and other issues.

11.6 Reimbursable Grant programme

This programme has been installed to bridge funding gaps for NGOs. For the time being the Reimbursable Grant programme is delivering much required and appreciated services to NGOs. The weaknesses leading to - and influencing this programme are to be found in the inefficient systems in partner countries, and therefore can not be solved by REF.
12 Acknowledgment

The evaluators would like to express gratitude the Board the Roma Education Fund for the excellent cooperation. The Board has done the most possible to make the evaluation efficient and relevant. A special thank goes to the Board members that took the time for on-line meetings and responding on the questionnaire sent.

Very special thanks also go to the REF management, who did a great effort to collect and structure the data required to make this evaluation possible, and who greatly facilitated our work during our field mission to Hungary.

Further, the evaluators would like to express their thanks to all country facilitators and REF employees in Albania, Hungary, Romania and Serbia for their support and facilitation of the field assessments and logistics. It has been a great experience working with such dedicated people.

And last but not least we also send our grateful appreciation to all project and NGO staff and all other participants and stakeholders, who kindly took their time to participate in the interviews and to contribute to the information and data collection for this report. The inside into their work they provided, and the opinions they expressed gave the evaluators the required knowledge and data to write this report. Particularly we wish to send our gratitude to the parents and children who shared their personal experiences with us. We sincerely hope that this work will contribute to achieve the visions of REF and the people working on it.

Helsinki, 27.10.2012