



Roma Education Fund



Strategy paper of the Roma Education Fund

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1 Background

Since it was founded in 2005, REF's growth has been rapid. In its first year of operations, REF reached 5,000 beneficiaries; by 2013 REF's outreach had multiplied twenty times and the cumulative number of annual beneficiaries exceeded 100,000.

In this eight-year period REF spent €41 million on a total of 451 projects. Early childhood education accounted for 21% of expenditure (117 projects); primary education for 29% of expenditure (195 projects); secondary education for 15% (45 projects); higher education 26% (48 projects); and teacher training 9% (46 projects).

Even allowing for tangible progress made to close the gap in education outcomes between Roma and non-Roma, the challenges that prevail in times of economic crisis remain formidable. According to EU statistics¹, less than half of Roma youth complete primary education in Europe compared to 97% of non-Roma. Non-completion of formal schooling leads to automatic exclusion from secondary and tertiary education. Failure in school leaves young people unable to compete in the labour market and perpetuates social exclusion.

However, there are clear indicators of how change for the better can happen, and how it has happened, and REF's contribution to this shift has been significant. International data shows that where policy makers allow sufficient time for effective reforms to take root, the educational outcomes of Roma improve. Data from the Regional Roma Survey conducted by UNDP and World Bank shows that of the four Decade priority areas, it is only in education where clear advances are being made.

At EU level Roma advocates are increasingly visible and across the continent there is a growing number of well-educated Romani professionals and active citizens striving for equity in education. Prior to the launch of Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005, while Roma education was a priority for the OSCE and the Council of Europe it was still not a priority in EU or national policy agendas. Since then the policy debate has utterly transformed. The Decade and the 2011 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies are the most important policy frameworks for a comprehensive approach to inclusive education for Roma.

The cumulative effect of years of work by REF, its partners, and others including policy advocacy, strategic litigation and project implementation, with ever larger cohorts of Roma students successfully graduating from secondary and tertiary education has created an unprecedented momentum around Roma education.

In the strongest political signal yet to come from Brussels, the December 2013 European Council recommendations called on Member States "to ensure equal treatment and full access for Roma boys and girls to quality and mainstream education and to ensure that all Roma pupils complete at least compulsory education." The measures fully embraced the REF agenda and included: eliminating any school segregation; ending inappropriate placement of Roma pupils in special needs schools; reducing early school leaving; increasing access and quality of early childhood education and care; and encouraging greater parental involvement and improving teacher training.

REF has a vital role to play, and must press on with its successes, to ensure that this widening consensus and commitment to close the gap in educational outcomes for Roma translates into effective implementation on the ground.

¹Roma Integration – 2014 Commission Assessment:
Questions and Answers: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-11-400_en.htm

2 What makes REF unique

REF is a unique organization in many ways, not least in terms of its geographic reach, covering 16 countries across Central and Eastern Europe; its strong emphasis on substantive Roma participation; and its range of interventions at all levels in the education cycle, from pre-school to post-graduate studies. The extent of REF's strong working partnerships with educational institutions, municipalities and ministries, Romani NGOs, national and international organizations and institutions is unmatched. Thus REF is uniquely placed to steer change, implement effective projects, and direct its own funding and leverage other source funding to best effect to make equal access and equitable educational outcomes a reality for Romani children and young people across Central and Eastern Europe.

Another defining characteristic of REF's modus operandi is the relationship with grantees and target communities. REF maintains close contact with all its beneficiaries through a network of country facilitators who are young Roma graduates. Active in the field, they provide technical assistance and are in regular contact with past, present, and potential grantees. Country facilitators also follow national educational policy closely, and keep the REF office fully updated on these developments.

REF staff conducts regular monitoring visits to its projects, meets directly with the beneficiaries, solicits direct feedback from parents, and visits the institutions and the implementing organizations. They closely review the activity plans and indicators, and provide technical assistance to improve implementation.

Among the strongest obstacles to integrated and inclusive education are anti-Roma prejudice and an attendant lack of political will to embrace thoroughgoing reform. By working closely with teachers and trainee teachers, with mayors and municipalities to build partnerships and facilitate dialogue, REF cultivates a sense of shared ownership in project interventions at local level. This is a difficult process and requires a minimum of five-year cooperation to take root. However, the experience to date suggests strongly that this way of working wins over key local stakeholders to inclusive education, that practical engagement in the day-to-day work of implementation helps to diffuse resistance and build a broader consensus for equity.

In terms of changing attitudes, REF closely focuses on trainee teachers (in Croatia, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia) and closely cooperates with teacher colleges and pedagogical departments of universities. Through this work, future teachers learn not only the theory of change and equity but REF provides them with onsite training and work experience as volunteers to work directly with Roma communities and students on REF-supported projects.

The external institutional evaluation in 2012 of REF work commissioned by the Swiss Development Agency² confirmed REF's high standing among grantees and stakeholders; survey respondents citing the prompt responses, close involvement, and responsible approach taken by the organization. The evaluation showed that: "the majority of 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."

REF is uniquely qualified to deliver high quality programmes and demonstrate tangible results in the education of Roma across the Decade countries. It has a proven track record of developing and implementing complex programmes in collaboration with governments and civil society. It has a highly efficient and effective mechanism for identifying good projects which can be speedily implemented, and for evaluating their outcomes. The combination of extensive grant-making, direct implementation, monitoring,

² REF donor since 2006

evaluation and promotion of cross-country learning exchanges, provides a formidable basis to assist governments and other stakeholders in the design and successful implementation of large-scale, quality interventions.

3 Four core priorities

3.1 Access to compulsory education

REF intends to devote approximately €3 million per year for a total of €15 million over the next five years to ensure that models and strategies which are proving effective in enrolling, retaining and graduating Roma students are developed, expanded and adopted by local authorities and other parties.

There's increasing evidence that children gain greatly from going to preschool; children who attend good quality preschool enter primary school with better pre-reading skills, richer vocabularies, and stronger basic math skills than those who do not.

REF remains highly committed to enabling more Roma families and children from excluded communities to benefit from early childhood education and care. The majority of Roma children from vulnerable communities is not enrolled in preschool and kindergarten programs, later leading to enrollment in special schools, dropping out and low educational attainment. The majority of these children come from socially deprived communities and have parents with very limited educational backgrounds themselves. 72% of REF grants and 50% of overall REF spending target these children. REF runs preschool/kindergarten enrollment projects in all of its focus countries. REF maintains Toy Libraries in six countries. Our advocacy and expertise has contributed to the introduction and implementation of compulsory kindergarten in Serbia, Hungary, Macedonia, Slovakia and Romania.

In the area of secondary education REF invested over €6 million, successfully completing 45 projects. In general the number of Roma successfully completing secondary education has increased markedly over the last 8 years, in part due to REF's interventions.

Across the region, data show that 98% of REF-supported secondary school scholars complete school and graduate. It is vitally important that REF continues to support and cultivate this target group for successful completion of secondary education is vital to compete in the labor market and these young people serve as positive role models for their communities, families and siblings.

For example, in the Vojvodina region of Serbia REF started its secondary scholarship and mentorship project in the 2007/2008 school year. In the seven years since the start of the project a total of 2,360 scholarships were awarded. The most significant accomplishment of the project is a radical decrease in the dropout rate of Roma students from upper secondary schools. At the beginning of the project the dropout rate was close to 30%. In the last year the dropout rate has decreased to 0% among project beneficiaries.

In Macedonia, when REF started its secondary scholarship program in 2007, the national dropout rate for Roma students was over 26%. After four years of implementation, among the REF-supported target group dropout rates have fallen below 6%, dropping to less than 1% for the last three school years. Nationally, in Macedonia,³ the completion rate for Roma in upper secondary school has risen from about 10% in 2004 to a current level of 17%.⁴, the gap in completion rates is visibly closing between Roma and non Roma.

³ In Macedonia country data for completion of upper secondary education is 25%

⁴ UNDP & World Bank, Regional Roma survey: http://issuu.com/undp_in_europe_cis/docs/education_web

3.2 Access to tertiary education

A central piece of REF's mission is to increase the number of Roma in tertiary education, and as an outcome to contribute to raising up a Roma elite. Therefore, REF intends to devote approximately €4 million per year or €20 million over the next five years to provide scholarships and mentoring support and career guidance for the growing number of Roma university and technical school students, to enable them to successfully graduate and move into gainful employment. REF's main tool in this regard is its scholarship program. In addition, REF will increase grants to develop alumni, professional and other associations to assist Roma students in their post-graduate careers.

In 2005, the program awarded 700 scholarships and in 2013, over 1500 scholarships (from over 2000 applications). Among the scholarship recipients in 2013–2014, 888 students were enrolled in Bachelor's degree programs, 336 in Master's degree programs, 103 in undivided tertiary education programs (i.e. programs that are integrating BA with MA or their equivalents) and 42 in doctoral programs. The enormous progress made is clear from REF data for all countries in the previous academic year, which show a tertiary education completion rate of 69 percent among REF scholarship recipients, only three percent below the European average.

REF is considering new programs such as after-school and post-graduate job skills development; engaging local and international entrepreneurs to mentor Roma graduates and provide placements, professional training and support. The Health Scholarships scheme will seek opportunities to ensure graduate job placements within the ministries of health and public health institutions.

3.3 Strengthen civil society capacities

Since 2006, REF's Reimbursable Grants Program has provided support to Roma NGOs in accessing EU Structural Funds (ESF, IPA) and other associated funds. As disbursements of EU funds are frequently delayed, without REF's assistance these projects would have run into problems and more than likely failed. During the past 6 years REF has helped 39 NGOs in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia to leverage €34,267,128 of EU support with REF loans of only €678,280. The current leveraging ratio is 51 to 1. In order to further develop this resource for Roma NGOs, the Council of Europe Development Bank provided a loan to REF, which enables us to make available an additional EUR 1.5 million in financial resources in the form of reimbursable grants in all Decade countries.

REF will strive to increase the EU funds available in support of Roma education. REF intends to allocate €0.66 million per year to this area or €3.3 million over the next five years. If the above leveraging ratio holds in the future, REF can expect with the loan fund to support Roma NGOs to make use of €166 million in EU funds.

3.4 Build the evidence for effective policy-making

REF's research and policy work aims at (i) producing and disseminating evidence-based research on Roma education in CEE, using the data collected by REF via its application and evaluation systems and comparing with the available data on the mainstream population; (ii) monitoring regularly the legislation and policies in the REF countries of intervention, to increase REF programs' efficiency by adjusting them to in-country changing policy environments; (iii) providing evidence-based policy recommendations to the EU and REF countries of intervention and sharing our experience with policy makers.

REF policy analysis and research activities conducted in the past have resulted in the publication of numerous reports highlighting the most critical issues affecting the education of Romani children.

Similarly with past practice, REF will ensure that the focus of research and analysis is to demonstrate clearly what works in the field, which interventions are most effective in increasing Roma enrollment and graduation; how best to address those Roma most at risk for early school leaving; and to identify the general social and economic benefits of inclusive education for Roma; and to analyze life and career trajectories of alumni from the scholarship programs. REF will also use research to analyze the impact of REF's own work.

4 Five models shaping grants and policy

REF has moved from a proposal-based to a model-based grant program. The purpose of the model based framework is to help partners design programs for funding that have a high chance of successful outcomes, as well as to better assess REF's actual progress compared to its targets. The five models described below, developed by REF together with World Bank staff, require a detailed description of the identified problems; in-built needs assessment; in-depth data collection; sophisticated but easily applicable methodology; and ready-made project components. Supported projects will have pre-defined project development objectives, results framework, outcome and output indicators, risk assessment combined with risk mitigation measures, project management and implementation requirements, monitoring and evaluation tools. These models will be supported by REF on an achievable scale; proven good practice and good policy can then be scaled up using EU or national budget funds.

Model 1. Early Childhood Education

The main objective of the early childhood development (ECD) model is to improve school readiness and early childhood development outcomes of Romani children aged between 0–6 by improving the enrollment and attendance in mainstream ECD services; enhancing parenting skills; strengthening the link between parents and preschool facilities; and raising the quality of ECD services, such as teaching and learning methods.

Model 2. Primary Education

The primary education model objective is to improve education outcomes for children aged between 6 and 14 by improving access and supporting enrollment into integrated schools; after-school programs to provide tutoring and mentoring; preventing early school leaving; enhancing parenting skills and strengthening the link between parents and schools; providing remedial classes for children and offering professional support and guidance to the school staff and authorities.

Model 3. Secondary Education

The secondary education model objective is to improve the academic performance of students and to raise the retention and graduation rate of Romani upper secondary school students through better outreach, provision of scholarships, school-based mentoring, and tutoring support.

Model 4. Tertiary Education

The REF designed *Romaversitas* program objective is to provide comprehensive support to Romani university students to overcome the challenges they face and to improve their levels of retention, performance, and graduation, building a new generation of active citizens and professionals. It serves as a bridge for Romani students to ensure they have access to quality resources and includes scholarships, mentoring, tutoring and additional training in professional development and language competences. The *Romaversitas* model also helps strengthen students' Romani identity and community participation.

Model 5. Adult Education

This model objective is to improve the education level and employment prospects for young Romani adults. It provides those with incomplete primary and/or secondary education with tutoring and financial support to complete formal primary and/or secondary education. This model also aims to improve the literacy and social communication skills of illiterate and semi-literate Romani parents (mainly mothers) of preschool and school-age children, and to enhance their involvement in their children's education through provision of non-formal literacy and social communication skills trainings.

5 Looking forward to the next five years

Embedding effective models for inclusive Roma education requires strong partnership with national and sub-national education authorities and substantive Roma participation. This requires intense communication with them throughout the process of adjusting the best practice models to national and local contexts. This move from proposal-based to model-based program design and funding is a clear sign of REF's increased accountability and ownership of the projects and their results, and will increase the capacity to expand and enhance these models.

The move to the five models does not preclude REF from supporting some particularly compelling grassroots, and innovative new project ideas.

The REF five-year business plan includes a clear financing and funding strategy to support REF's four core priorities and five models for the 2015-2020 planning period. The business plan also includes a multi-dimensional heat-map analysis of the situation in each of the countries, complemented by a three-scenario (conservative, realistic, optimistic) analysis to identify the development potential of REF's key programs. These scenarios define the costs and funding needs for the planning period. REF intends to deliver on its objectives, and towards this end to continue to increase support from its donors and to diversify its funding base.

5.1 Geographic Scope

Geographic scope was originally defined by the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Expansion beyond the initial Decade Countries was driven initially by donor interest but subject to the same criteria that underpinned work in Decade countries, namely grants are processed taking into account the cumulative amount of grants in each country in light of the relative size of the Romani population, relative income levels, and the availability of funding from alternative sources. REF has received requests from different sources, including important donors, to expand the number of countries where we work. Any expansion to other countries would depend upon consideration of the following factors: the added value of REF interventions and the prospects of systemic policy impact based on the five model interventions in any given country; whether circumstances would permit to maintain a sustainable presence in any new countries for a reasonable time period (e.g., in the case of tertiary scholarships, time to allow a cohort of students to complete university studies).

It would be premature to contemplate exiting from any of the Decade countries, and from Ukraine and Russia (where we have Law and Humanities scholarship program only), where we currently operate. Even if a country were to dramatically progress in terms of policy and budgetary commitments, with compulsory kindergarten, primary and secondary education, provided for in law and policy this would not mean that we could depart. A very visible departure just when things are beginning to get better would likely have a de-motivating effect (in neighboring countries also), and progress could be reversed.

5.2 Timescale

In 2004 the World Bank conducted a needs assessment where they estimated that the funding gap between Roma and non-Roma in education in the eight initial Decade countries would require investments of about €120-200 million annually in the early stages and between €390 - 650 million annually by the end of the Decade.

The Bank optimistically projected that, by 2015, national governments would absorb at least 90% of the costs of educating Roma and external financing requirements would be reduced to about €40 - 65 million annually. While detailed funding data is lacking in most countries, it is clear that no country with a significant Roma population has invested nearly the level of resources needed in order to bridge the gap between Roma and non-Roma in education.

In the countries where REF is working, where schools have to operate three daily shifts, and many students' home circumstances are so dire, one thing is certain: without additional support, large numbers of these young people will just drop out of school. In regions of acute socio-economic deprivation, without qualifications, or job opportunities, and no capacity for mobility, students who fail to complete their education will remain trapped in poverty. To bridge the gap between Roma and non-Roma in education is a long term, multigenerational exercise, and the need for REF will exist for a long time, certainly beyond the current five year plan.

5.3 Beneficiaries

REF has greatly expanded the number of directly assisted beneficiaries since its beginnings (from 5,000 in 2005 to a cumulative total of 100,000 in 2013). And REF intends to raise the percentage of those directly served over the coming years, in order to demonstrate the feasibility of operating its models at a scalable level.

One effective way to increase the number of beneficiaries is by REF implementing large EU-funded projects in cooperation with the public authorities (as is the case now in Montenegro, Romania and Serbia). In other countries, where policy-based advocacy has been successful (e.g. Macedonia and Hungary), we aim to increase the percentage of those directly benefitting by mainstream policy reform.

Our ultimate goal would be to decrease the percentage of unassisted students to zero. However, it is neither possible nor desirable for any foundation to serve 100% of a target population. REF strives to strike a balance between serving as many beneficiaries as possible and necessary to demonstrate that equity is possible, but not to allow governments to cede their responsibilities. REF demonstrates the viability of supplemental services necessary to bridge the gap for Roma students; it does not replace or supplant the core state supported educational system. REF aims to demonstrate viable model interventions that can be scaled up by the authorities to ensure 100% percent coverage.

REF's intention is to increase the percentage of beneficiaries directly served by REF, to continue to demonstrate the effectiveness of such interventions, to show that they make a real difference in raising completion rates and encourage other sponsors and governments to take the initiative and responsibility to expand curricular enhancement programs, with the ultimate objective of serving all those in need.

5.4 Funding environment

REF works in a challenging environment: the deep economic crisis has resulted in drastic cuts in government spending on education in those countries with large Roma populations; the electoral successes

of racist and extremist political parties poses a direct threat to progress on inclusive education for Roma; and short term commitments from donors, plus the very short 1-2 year cycles typical of EU-funded projects, make longer term education planning difficult, if not impossible.

Due to this financial environment, REF had to shift its fundraising strategy, focusing on the following main directions:

- Establish local offices, partnerships and presence in order to apply for EU (ESF and IPA) calls in consortia in order to mobilize bigger funds for Roma education;
- Work with past donors and encourage an extension of their contributions;
- Engage donors in new EU member countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia);
- Mobilize more private sector resources, especially from private foundations and private companies, as well as individual donations;
- Participate in a selection of tenders and calls where the REF Network can contribute its professional knowledge, but for which REF currently does not have dedicated financial resources such as European level working groups for exchange of knowledge

For the period up to 2020, in both EU Member States and accession countries, the European Commission can be a principal funding resource. However, the prospects of unlocking structural funds for Roma education in the EU Member States and candidate countries still remains fraught and unpredictable to such an extent that the smooth and efficient operation of REF promoted models cannot yet be guaranteed.

REF will aim to take successful programmes to scale and to extend these programmes into other countries by leveraging EU funding wherever possible. REF's achievements in leveraging funds are considerable: compared to 2010 REF recorded an almost five-fold increase in its funding coming from EU sources.

5.5 Partnerships

REF works as a facilitator and enabler for local NGOs and municipalities that would otherwise not have the capacity to manage EU funds, by being a direct applicant for such funds and by leveraging funds through its system of revolving loans and reimbursable grants.

The key to working effectively in so many countries is flexible, project-based REF interventions. Circumstances and opportunities vary so much that there is no single model of operation. The condition of maintaining a REF staff presence in any target country is that operational and overhead costs be covered by project-based funding. As for flexibility, REF shares costs and space with other organisations wherever possible.

This approach of flexible, project-based interventions with minimal staffing and overhead costs ensures that REF is among the most efficient and effective organizations operating in the field of education. REF spends 82 percent of its operating budget on programs, ensuring that donations have a maximum impact in 16 countries.

In short, REF is a Romani organisation of unparalleled sophistication and unmatched capacity, with a wide geographic reach and working partners that range from local grassroots community based organisations to major international professional institutions and donors.

5.6 Specific outcomes

Over the next five years in terms of specific outcomes by priority areas, REF commits to accomplish the following:

5.6.1 Access to compulsory education

- **Early Childhood Development:** REF will convincingly demonstrate in multiple communities that cost-effective ECD programs can be successfully designed for Roma students and their parents, and that graduates of these programs have measurably better outcomes than children who have not benefitted from such programs. REF's target is that 90% of children in target communities are enrolled in ECD programs, in line with EU benchmarks.
- **Classroom Integration:** REF will demonstrate convincingly in multiple school systems that Roma children can be fully integrated into regular classes and achieve educational outcomes largely comparable to the general population. REF's target is that segregation of Roma students in special classes of any kind will decrease by 15% in the countries where the representation of Roma children in special schools is significant.
- **School Completion:** REF's target is that at least 95% of supported students will graduate from primary schools with test scores indicating basic proficiency across required subjects (primarily literacy and numeracy) and that 95% of REF supported students will graduate from upper secondary schools. Successful examples of Roma students completing primary and secondary school will be numerous, widely publicized, and the necessary interventions to assure completion and proficiency will be widely known and documented.
- **High Risk Students.** REF-run initiatives include models designed and implemented to target students at high risk of early school leaving (ESL). REF intends to reach 20% of potential ESL through pilot programs. These models will be known, studied and a number of them will have been adopted by state actors and will be funded from national and EU sources.

5.6.2 Access to tertiary education

- **Tertiary Education Participation:** At least 2,000 Roma supported by REF will have attended recognized universities and tertiary training programs yearly, with at least 30% in fields with high employment prospects and/or with clear opportunities to address Roma community challenges. The graduation level of Roma students will be comparable to EU average.
- **International Opportunities:** Due to the REF-developed network, Roma students will have similar access to international study opportunities as their non-Roma counterparts and Roma-specific international scholarships/fellowships will be available for the top 10% of Roma students.
- **Employability:** At least one-third of these tertiary-level REF supported graduates will have received specific, cost-effective training in job related skills via volunteer work and internships in various organizations such as REF public partners, civil partners and REF itself. At least two-thirds of them will be actively involved in alumni, professional/trade support groups and networks which support finding and retaining work.
- **Policy Change in tertiary education:** REF advocacy and concrete practices will contribute to the drafting of progressive and inclusive national higher education policies, which commit national governments to increasing Roma participation in tertiary education.

5.6.3 *Strengthen civil society capacities*

Extension of the Reimbursable Grant program: Given the scarcity of funds available to Roma NGOs implementing EU Structural Funds and other grants in the region, REF has also made available its financial resources through a system of reimbursable grants. The Reimbursable Grants Program will be available for NGOs in EU member states and for non-EU members, principally in the Western Balkans as well. We expect that we will mobilize further grants in the field of Roma education. REF intends to allocate minimum € 0.66 million per year to this area or €3.3 million over the next five years. If the current 51 to 1 leveraging ratio holds in the future, REF can expect with the loan fund to support Roma NGOs to make use of €166 million in EU funds.

5.6.4 *Build the evidence for effective policy-making*

- **Implementation of inclusive policies on local, regional and national levels:** After nine years of REF's policy advocacy, project implementation and cooperation, there has been a discernible and positive shift in attitudes towards Roma education and many concrete achievements in those localities where REF been working. It is our objective that an even larger number of organizations join in REF's mission to close the gap in educational outcomes, and actively engage working in the field with Roma communities and schools and that more governments develop their inclusive strategies for Roma education in national policies.
- **Changing the attitude of the mainstream society:** The Roma Education Fund believes that it is on the tipping point of changing attitudes and commitments towards Roma education. We want to achieve that more governments, more mayors, a broad range of EU actors and other donors, and the civil sector are working together to invest in Roma education, with more and more quality projects in the field.
- **Influencing the future generations of teachers:** As an educational foundation, REF aspires to influence future generations of teachers, involving them in REF's fieldwork, and work with REF grantees. Later this new teacher generation will champion inclusive education, progressive teaching methods, and their inclusion in academic curricula. REF will continue to advocate for revised university curriculum with two components: students receive credits for attending lectures combined with compulsory practical training held in REF project sites. As an outcome, a significant number of teachers with positive attitudes will join the education system.

6 Conclusion

As a grant maker, REF is uniquely qualified to continue to deliver high quality programs and demonstrate tangible results across the Decade countries and beyond. It has a proven track record of developing and implementing complex programs in collaboration with governments and civil society. All of REF's achievements are attributable to the priority given to Roma participation. As a legitimate and sustainable organization, REF serves as a catalyst driving the debate for fundamental educational reform. REF's heightened profile and an even wider recognition of its preeminence in the field across Europe, combined with a growing body of concrete achievements on the ground will prove to be key in sustaining the momentum to close the gaps in education between Roma and non-Roma up to, and way beyond 2020.