



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



FOUNDATION ФОНДАЦИЈА
OPEN OTBORENO OΠΠHTECTBO
SOCIETY OΠΠHTECTBO
MACEDONIA MAKEДOHIЈA



Radu Florea

Kristina Hadji-Vasileva

Ramcho Kundevski

Viktor Mirchevski

Roma Education Project

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT



Radu Florea

Kristina Hadji-Vasileva
Ramcho Kundevski
Viktor Mirchevski

Roma Education Project

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT

Skopje, May-August 2013

Publisher:

Foundation Open Society-Macedonia

For the publisher:

Vladimir Milcin

Authors:

Radu Florea

Kristina Hadji - Vasileva

Viktor Mirchevski

Copies printed:

100 copies

Free/non-commercial circulation

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација
Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје

37.043.1-054(=214.58:497.7)(047)

ПРОЕКТ за образование на Роми : извештај од евалуација на учинокот / Раду Флореа ... [и др.]. - Скопје : Фондација отворено општество - Македонија, 2014. - 48, 44 стр. : граф. прикази ; 20x20 см

Насл. стр. на припечатениот текст: Roma education project : performance evaluation / Radu Florea. - Обата текста меѓусебно печатени во спротивни насоки. - Текст на мак. и англ. јазик. - Фусноти кон текстот

ISBN 978-608-218-194-3

1. Флореа, Раду [автор]

а) Роми во Македонија - Образовни методи - Извештаи COBISS.MK-ID 95452682

This report was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development within the USAID Roma Education Project.

The authors views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Glossary of terms	4
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
2. MAIN FINDINGS	11
2.1. What differences has the project made in the lives of beneficiaries?	11
2.2. Which aspects of the program had the biggest effect on beneficiaries and why?	17
2.3. Perception on Gender Issues	23
2.4. Fetija’s Story: Breaking Stereotypes about Roma Girls	25
2.5. The Roma parents and their children	26
2.6. The Roma Education Project: The Voice of its Beneficiaries	29
2.7. Meet the Parents: A Focus Group with Parents of Roma Children	31
3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	33
4. KEY LESSONS LEARNED	39

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

REP Roma Education Project

REC Roma Education Center

RWCT Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Methodology

USAID United States Agency for International Development

FOSM Foundation Open Society Macedonia

ROMAVERSITAS University component of the Roma Education Project

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Roma Education Project's team would like to express its gratitude to all people who have taken the time and participated in the project's final evaluation. Without their assessments, opinions, positions and recommendations, the report would not have been developed in this form.

Profound gratitude to the principals, pedagogical and psychological staff, and the teachers from all project schools for their honest views about the project's impact on pupils' achievements, but also its influence on school policies and practices. We would like to particularly thank the teachers/mentors from high schools who, despite the fact that the project component in which they have been involved is completed several years ago, accepted the invitation and shared their experiences from the project activities and their thoughts about the project's impact.

We owe a debt of gratitude to all project participants (pupils, students and parents) for sharing their experiences, the project's impact on their education success and their careers, but also for their assessment of the project's influence on education policies and the overall advancement of education among Roma people in Macedonia.

Acknowledgement is given to the donor representatives, the Directorate for Development and Promotion of Education in the Languages of the Communities and the partner organizations for their observations and ideas for continuation of project activities in the future.

We would like to commend Mr Radu Florea and his team for the high professionalism and commitment in preparing the project evaluation and this report.

Finally, we hope that this report will serve education policy-makers, donors and non-governmental organizations and that many of the lessons learned and the recommendations will be taken into consideration when determining future policies and designing future projects aimed to improve the education of Roma people.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USAID Roma Education Project (REP), implemented by the Foundation Open Society Macedonia, is a 4.5 million USD initiative that works with the Roma communities to raise awareness about the importance of education and assists over 1,500 Roma students annually to improve their school performance and completion rates. The current project activities focus on working with preschool and primary school students. In the previous years, the project also worked with secondary school and university students and provided scholarships, mentoring and other academic support.

During 2004-2009, the Roma Education Project provided scholarships to and mentored 364 secondary school students, and 135 university students. The project also provided training to 400 teachers from eight primary schools on such topics as interactive teaching methods, intercultural education, and how to deal with diversity and promote social justice.

During 2004-2010, REP partnered with five Roma centers (two in Skopje, two in Kumanovo and one in Prilep) for provision of after-school tutoring and homework support to 900 pupils in grades 1-9. In the same period, REP used Step by Step trainers for the provision of teacher training. Since 2011, the number of Centers decreased to four (the

Soncogledi Center was closed). Simultaneously, the REP teacher training portfolio was enriched and the pool of trainers expanded in order to strengthen capacities of project schools for child-centered teaching methods, improving curricula and annual schools plans, introducing materials that promote cultural diversity and deal with prejudice. From 2004 till the end of 2012 the project provided training to 453 primary schools teachers.

To promote greater cultural awareness and intercultural tolerance, the partner schools are implementing a variety of activities that bring together children from the different ethnic groups (Macedonian, Roma, Serbian, and Albanian etc.).

REP takes a holistic approach to improving preschool and primary education for Roma students. The project takes into consideration negative circumstances that exist both inside and outside school and is concerned with changing the educational environment on many levels. This involves changing attitudes not just on the part of the students, but also on the part of teachers, school administrators and the Roma community. To achieve this, the program uses child-centered methodologies, makes an effort to include parents, provides opportunities for education and activities outside of school through the RECs,

and has implemented anti-bias training within schools to improve the approach of teachers and administrators. The project also encourages investment from a broad array of stakeholders, including schools, local governments, the central government and local Roma NGOs.

The REP project document planned four components: pre-school, primary school (both implemented from the start of the project to date), secondary school and university (both implemented from the beginning of the project till 2010).

By following the needs of its beneficiaries and stakeholders - and adjusting its activities accordingly - the Roma Education Project managed to expand its impact on several levels i.e. teacher training was re-introduced in the last three years of the project, based on the results of the teacher training needs assessment in 7 REP primary schools.

The project also took into consideration the need for greater involvement of Roma parents in order to sustain project results and acted accordingly by increasing activities that involve them and support them.

The RECs have worked with all ages of students. There has been a particular emphasis on pre-

school education, in an effort to better prepare children for entry into primary school. At this level, the centers focus on improving language skills, basic knowledge in mathematics, social skills, motivation to learn and personal hygiene.

The centers endeavor in their approach to include not just the Roma children, but also their parents and the community at large, with the cooperation of local schools. Activities for parents include educational workshops on various topics and meetings where they discuss the importance of education, school attendance, and child development.

The project's comprehensive community-based approach has produced impressive results:

- ▶ **over 90% of the preschool children assisted by the project have successively enrolled in first grade and over 94% of primary school children participating in the project have successfully completed their grades;**
- ▶ **298 secondary school students who received scholarships have successfully completed high school; the Ministry of Education and Science in Macedonia has recognized the success of the scholarship/mentorship model and since 2009 has been providing scholarships to Roma students;**

- ▶ since 2004, 92 scholarship recipients have completed university studies; most of these graduates are employed in public administration, schools, NGOs, and international organizations and are strong advocates for Roma inclusion and active participants in Roma communities;
- ▶ there is a greater awareness among the parents about the importance of education for securing a better future for their children and many are now actively participating in school activities and serve on parents' councils and school boards.

It is worth mentioning the significant contribution of the Romaversitas to strengthen university education among the Roma population. Their efforts have improved the status and achievements of Roma university students, compensating the limited efforts of governmental bodies in resolving such issues. The majority of the Roma student beneficiaries has successfully progressed in their studies and achieved the standards expected in higher education. Romaversitas' achievements are even more remarkable since the university component of the Roma Education Project was deployed in the last years with exclusive support from the Foundation Open Society Macedonia and Roma Education Fund.

The research methodology used to produce the evaluation report was designed to address the overall scope of the proposed assessment - to examine the effects that activities of REP had on project beneficiaries. The present evaluation report is organized to respond to the three main evaluation questions:

What differences has the project made in the lives of beneficiaries?

Which aspects of the program had the biggest effect on beneficiaries and why?

Which would be the key activities and interventions to continue, and what role do constituents see for themselves in these efforts?

The first two evaluation questions are addressed in Chapter 2: Main Findings, whilst the third question is covered by Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations.

The report also summarizes the lessons learned and provides further considerations on how this initiative could continue and improve its performance in its possible future interventions.

The evaluation research was conducted in a number of locations where the project was implemented (Skopje, Kumanovo, and Prilep), and was based on quantitative and qualitative

data collected using the following tools:

- ▶ **Desk research (secondary data analysis) - a careful analysis of the existing project documentation and related records;**
- ▶ **Individual, in-depth interviews performed during field visits in the target locations, with a selection of key project informers/actors: school principals and representatives of school psychological-pedagogical services, REC representatives (managers and educators), USAID and FOSM project staff, other stakeholders;**
- ▶ **Focus group discussions with parents of REP/REC pre-school and primary school beneficiaries, primary school teachers, high school mentors, REP secondary school scholarship students/graduates, and REP university students (beneficiaries of the project).**
- ▶ **Questionnaires were distributed in electronic format (by e-mail) to teachers from REP project primary schools; online questionnaires were available for REP secondary school scholarship students/graduates, and REP university students beneficiaries (except for those who attended focus groups).**

The key conclusion of this evaluation report is that the Roma Education Program was an invaluable experience that achieved remarkable results and has an outstanding potential for continuation and replication. The project met its objectives, benefitting from a solid budget, a tailored, pipeline approach, and covering (in terms of final beneficiaries) entire age cohorts. Such a complex and ambitious project offers great potential lessons to be learned for its next phase, which may produce even greater coverage and addressability, yet building on its impressive impact and sustainable results.

The activities implemented by the Roma Education Project with the primary schools played a crucial role and addressed real needs and aspirations of the Roma communities. REP schools, in close cooperation with Roma Education Centers have increased the diversity and communication among children, and created a comprehensive environment through different activities.

The project enabled the participation of Roma and (later) non-Roma children in the extra-curricular activities organized by primary schools in cooperation with Roma Education Centers.

This had a positive impact on improving the relationships between Roma children and the others, and (indirectly) between Roma parents and the other parents.

The constant and proactive cooperation between schools and the Roma Education Centers was crucial in achieving the project's objectives and therefore improved in a significant way the retention rate of Roma children and decreased the overall number of drop-outs. The project also contributed in changing in a positive sense attitudes and perceptions within schools. By assisting Roma students to achieve better results, teachers have overcome the stereotypes that Roma students are low achievers and easy school drop-outs.

Roma high school students have improved their understanding of the meaning of education and their awareness on the importance to continue their studies in high schools and later in universities.

Students and graduates participating in the survey considered education as a precondition to become what they wish and articulate connections between education, employment and self-knowledge; they also view education

as the source for developing concrete skills with immediate practical application.

The main benefit, emphasized by the vast majority of Roma students / graduates, was the increased number of young Roma who followed university studies.

Working with Roma parents was a cross-cutting issue, mentioned by all stakeholder categories. In the past, the project was less successful in involving more actively the Roma parents. They were reluctant to participate in the school activities, individual meetings, parents' meetings and different workshops. However, in its later stages, the project managed to include parents more effectively - which led to Roma parents overcoming their inner fears and improving their confidence and self-esteem. They express satisfaction with the project activities and their ensuing results, since they observed the way in which their own children undertake school tasks, attend classes - and their motivation increased. Throughout the activities implemented jointly by the school and the local NGO, parents observed also that discrimination towards Roma children has decreased noticeably.

Although the project has fulfilled its overall goals and the sustainable changes produced

have reached the point of no return, there are many aspects which need further attention and support.

The project should continue and increase its impact and coverage. If the project activities are stopped, schools do not have the necessary means to continue their implementation (fully or partly).

The project should also have a special focus on activities targeting the Roma parents, increasing their awareness on the importance of the education, helping them understand its meaning and finality and assisting them in dealing with their children.

Keeping and developing quality education practices - including those promoted by the Roma Education Project - still need rigorous efforts and concerted contributions, with the involvement of all stakeholders: donors, specialized NGOs, schools, governmental bodies and agencies, former and actual direct beneficiaries (students, parents).

Roma Education Centers need to be assisted and their capacities built, with a focus on strengthening their organizational development

and fundraising capabilities - in order to develop even more efficient and constructive ways to address the needs of their main beneficiaries.

The conclusion of the report is that the vast majority of the project outcomes have been achieved in a responsible and sustainable way, and the program itself is an outstanding model of good practice. However, the positive results of the program need further consolidation and a financially-viable approach after the completion of USAID support.

Practically, most of the participants, past and current beneficiaries, as well as the Macedonian society expect a logical continuation and development of the project activities, having in mind the long-term commitment and positive approach of all its stakeholders. Through a strategic approach, based on financial sustainability and professionalization of RECs, as well as by strengthening the good cooperation with its strategic stakeholders, the Roma Education Project should continue to contribute significantly to its stated goals and the emancipation of the Macedonian Roma communities.

MAIN FINDINGS

2.1. WHAT DIFFERENCES HAS THE PROJECT MADE IN THE LIVES OF BENEFICIARIES?

From the very beginning of its activities, the Roma Education Project had to deal with great challenges reflected within the significant educational problems of the Roma community in Macedonia:

- ▶ high drop-out rate in primary school for Roma children (around 50%);
- ▶ common stereotypes concerning the Roma community, deeply rooted in the Macedonian society;
- ▶ hidden discrimination in schools and other public institutions;
- ▶ lower expectation of enrolling Roma students in primary / high school;
- ▶ less inclusive school system (for Roma as well as for other marginalized groups);
- ▶ negative influence from families on children who wish to join / continue school;
- ▶ no Roma parents participating in school activities, as well as a minimal number of Roma teachers;
- ▶ poverty, illiteracy and very basic living conditions for the majority of Roma families etc.

The activities implemented by the Roma Education Project with the primary schools were based on the previous successful experience of FOSM; they played a crucial role and addressed real needs and aspirations of the Roma communities. REP schools, in close cooperation with Roma Education Centers have increased the diversity and communication among children, and created a comprehensive environment through different activities.

The project enabled the participation of Roma and (later) non-Roma children in the extra-curricular activities organized by primary schools in cooperation with Roma Education Centers. This had a positive impact on improving the relationships between Roma children and the others, and (indirectly) between Roma parents and the other parents. Inter-cultural activities and the implementation of various small - but impressive - projects aiming at improving the inter-ethnic relations have been essential in this respect. These highly-inclusive activities were joined by children, parents and teachers, and

“In the Balkans, people need time to develop results”

(Teacher, primary school)

greatly contributed to a better understanding of diversity, multi-culturalism and human values. They also enabled an increased participation of Roma parents in school activities.

In Prilep, at “Dobre Jovanoski” primary school, the colorful walls of the building were jointly painted by children, teachers and parents. Small art projects such as this one are now traditional in the above-mentioned school. Subsequently - children are happy, increased their self-confidence and are better accepted within the groups, whilst inter-cultural approaches have been already integrated in the school curriculums.

Although these extra-curricular activities took place after the regular school classes - due to the professionalism and dedication of the teachers, pedagogues and social workers - children were happy and eager to participate. Numerous workshops, field trips, small projects, art and acting classes etc. had a huge impact on the Roma children, increasing their motivation for regular school attendance and which in turn increased their performance. Many children traveled and visited places (cities, museums, theatres, other schools) which were totally unknown to them.

Teachers and school principals involved in the survey compare the situation before and after the project’s interventions in the following terms:

- ▶ there is a documented, visible increase of the number of children attending school (including enrollment of Roma children in first grade), as well as reduced absenteeism;
- ▶ children have increased their interest and their awareness on the importance of school in daily life, as well as of education in general;
- ▶ Roma primary school students have higher grades and their participation in school activities has increased substantially, as well as their integration within the wider school community;
- ▶ teachers and school officials have better cooperation with Roma parents, and their involvement and preoccupation for school activities increased;
- ▶ there is increased knowledge of Macedonian language among Roma children.

Roma Education Centers provide key services and extra-curricular activities such as exam preparation, homework help, field visits, tutoring, creative workshops - ultimately aimed at increasing the school results and improving retention of Roma children in primary school. These activities - performed by school representatives together with local NGO activists - have involved children, teachers and pedagogues from their respective schools as well as their

“Before - when I was a teacher of physical education - I found strange, the divide, you could feel it and every time I went to class the Macedonians and the Roma wanted to plays sports but always against each other, not together, and this really irritated me... Now these things have been overcome.”

(Principal, primary school)

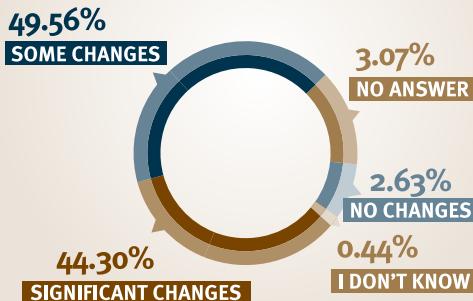
parents. The local NGOs hosting RECs have assisted schools in:

- ▶ **identifying children within the Roma communities who need assistance;**
- ▶ **informing their parents on the activities pertinent to their education;**
- ▶ **conducting field visits with school representatives to Roma neighborhoods (enabling them to understand the Roma way of living, to become aware on the life of Roma, improving their attitudes - and thus changing their way of work with Roma children.**

FIGURE 1:

(Positive) changes resulting from REP interventions on the overall state of primary education: teachers' perception.

Source: primary schools teachers' survey



Prior to the project, many children enrolled in primary school who were absent for more than one month (due to family seeking asylum abroad or seasonal work in other areas) were dropping-out. Cooperation between schools and local RECs improved the situation through the provision of catch-up classes and additional learning activities and assistance.

Roma Education Centers from different cities (and even different neighborhoods from the same city) share the same type of activities, yet have different support opportunities i.e. local municipalities. Most of them act as community centers and are perceived accordingly by the vulnerable groups they assist. Results for both preschool and primary school children are very positive and show that the Roma Education Centers have a crucial role in the successes of both groups.

High school mentors mentioned that some years ago, high schools were experiencing a lot of difficulties since they used to receive Roma students in their junior year who had difficulties reading and writing. Yet during the evolution of the project, extra-curricular activities and projects proved to have a decisive impact on the beneficiaries: students developed the habits for regularly coming to school and therefore improved their understanding of the schooling process in general.

“When SP Market was opened in Taftalidze I was pleased to see one of our former students working at the cash register. I think that all those who in a way made a move concerning education in their understanding or at home need to see the final benefit, something that shows closure: employment, independence, anything in that sense.”

(Psychologist, primary school)

Therefore, Roma high school students have improved their understanding of the meaning of education and their awareness on the importance to continue their studies in high schools and later in universities. This led to an issue mentioned frequently in discussions with the related stakeholders (and a proudly-spoken fact): Macedonian high schools have seen the most rapid advances among Roma students, in absolute numbers.

The Roma high school graduates feel that the project provided invaluable benefits to their personal and professional development:

- ▶ the opportunity to have an education and increase their self-esteem;
- ▶ increased knowledge and additional professional skills (by informal education, mentorship assistance etc.);
- ▶ career opportunities which otherwise would have been impossible due to their modest background;
- ▶ a necessary financial support which relieved the burden of their families;
- ▶ networking with other Roma or non-Roma students.

The students appreciated the additional activities (seminars, workshops, summer / winter

schools, field trips) developed during their life in the project, and consider mentorship equally important as the financial support.

University students showed from the very beginning great interest for inclusion in the project. Most of them were informed about the project through media or school channels. University and high school students expressed repeatedly the fact that most of them were attracted by the scholarship (which was considered indispensable to start and continue higher education), but throughout their involvement they found the REP mentoring assistance as being beneficial and instrumental for their personal development. The project ensured that the scholarship is not the only driving motivation, but decreases (or eliminates) the financial burden on Roma parents.

Considering their poor families' backgrounds, many young Roma would be unable to attend higher studies without extra help covering the overall costs of higher education, provided by the Roma Education Project. It is clear that without direct aid to Roma secondary school and university students, there would have been very little progress in raising enrollment for universities. Scholarships and mentoring help have increased both the quantity and quality of Roma students.

“A peer from high school told me once, very confused: So, Roma children are able to learn!”

(High school graduate)

2.2. WHICH ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAM HAD THE BIGGEST EFFECT ON BENEFICIARIES AND WHY?

According to teachers, social workers and pedagogues - prior to the start of the project, no Roma children were involved in school actions and/or celebrations. Their talents and skills added a rich and substantial contribution to the intercultural activities developed in schools, as well as to the traditional seasonal celebrations (Christmas, Easter, Roma holidays etc.).

The project also envisaged additional support for children not familiar with the Macedonian language. This significantly improved the integration of Roma children in the schools from the very beginning (from the first year).

According to primary school principals, the constant and proactive cooperation between schools and the Roma Education Centers was crucial in achieving the project’s objectives and therefore improved in a significant way the retention rate of Roma children and decreased the overall number of drop-outs. One may notice the high enrollment and retention rates of Roma children in primary schools, as compared to the situation 10 or more years ago. Most

of the schools from the project take pride in sharing publicly detailed information¹ about the achievements of Roma children.

Primary schools participating in the Roma Education Project have reached a high, positive level of self-awareness in which they promote the integration and education of Roma students through various trainings addressed to their staff, as well as by constant organizational development.

The vast majority of teachers agree that the Roma Education Project significantly improved the overall teaching methodology, as well as the attitudes and perceptions of the teaching staff. The training sessions and workshops - which involved 453 teachers from project schools in Skopje, Kumanovo, Prilep and Bitola - have been essential for learning various new and useful techniques on how to improve their everyday teaching to children with different ethnic

¹ Sample figures from one of the schools included in the project: ten years ago only 10-15 Roma children out of 120 were finishing primary school; in 2013 the percentage of Roma graduates is around 90%.

“We have about 100 Roma students but still 10,000 people need basic education”
(University graduate)

backgrounds. As best results (and subsequent impact) of these project activities, teachers emphasize the following:

- ▶ **Enriched local school curriculum for particular subjects, as proposed by the teachers who participated in such trainings;**
- ▶ **Increased motivation and awareness of the importance of education within primary school students - they achieve better overall results and continue their studies by enrolling to high school (where they continue to have better results); one of the interviewees from the school administration shared the example of a Roma schoolgirl whose parents are illiterate while she was an excellent student and managed to finish her university studies;**
- ▶ **Increased attendance of school classes - one of the main benefits of the project activities. Roma children now regularly come to school, understand better their role as students and have a positive perception about investment in education;**
- ▶ **Teachers improved their professional skills and increased their knowledge of teaching methods. Prior to the project activities, no school official was informed on the life of Roma, their living conditions, culture and tradition etc. The training sessions tackled topics such as anti-bias training of teachers employing Step**

by Step programming, Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) methodologies, School Management, Social Justice, New Teaching Methods and Techniques etc. All these sessions had a significant positive impact over the general work of the teachers.

The project also contributed in changing in a positive sense attitudes and perceptions within schools. By assisting Roma students to achieve better results, teachers have overcome the stereotypes that Roma students are low achievers and easy school drop-outs. Many testimonials witness a decreased level of prejudice in schools - with training for teachers playing a central part.

The positive changes on the overall state of primary education, as well the impact on the schools' policies and practices - resulting from the project's interventions - were identified as follows:

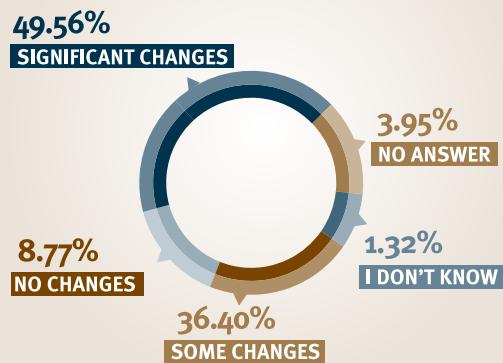
- ▶ **the project activities are now part of the core documentation which regulates primary school activities: Annual School Plan, Teachers' Curriculum etc., and other schools started to follow and institutionalize this model of good practice;**
- ▶ **schools organize regularly extra-curricular activities (using the REP model), as well as special intercultural programs, celebrations etc.;**

- ▶ cooperation with RECs (and local Roma NGOs in general) is praised and consolidated through official agreements and constant interaction;
- ▶ Roma parents and students are now members of the school councils / school students' councils (where applicable).

FIGURE 2:

Impact of REP activities in school policies and practices: teachers' perception

Source: primary schools teachers' survey



In high school, the mentors point out that the experience of working with young Roma students has helped them gain skills which they use now in working with other groups of students.

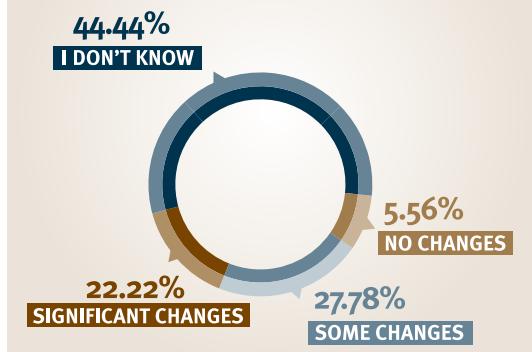
According to the mentors, the feeling of “belonging to the school” increased, as well as the general community spirit. This also increased their freedom of movement within the school premises. Initially, they would stay in the vicinity of the classroom or in spots within the school premises where they felt comfortable enough. Due to the mentors support and change of the general spirit in the schools they felt more comfortable to explore the school environment. In addition, mentors state that the Roma students became more ambitious which led to teachers involving them into other projects and activities outside of the project.

The figures below suggest also an interesting situation: while the Roma Education Project had a lesser impact on secondary school policies and practices, the students believe that the overall state of secondary education was positively and significantly influenced by the project.

FIGURE 3:

Impact of REP activities in high school policies and practices: students' perception

Source: university students / graduates survey



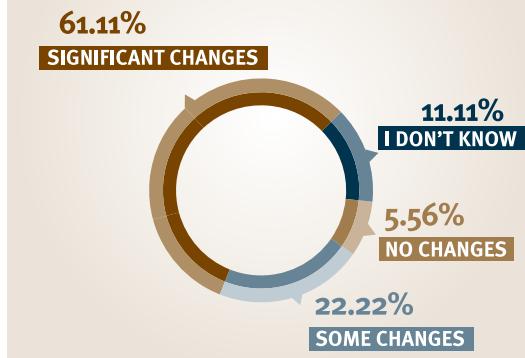
The most advanced and positive results (in absolute numbers) among Roma students have been obtained in high schools: over 1,700 Roma students have followed secondary education in Macedonia in the last two decades. Since 2009, the Ministry of Education and Science in Macedonia has recognized the success of the scholarship/mentorship model developed by FOSM and has been providing scholarships to Roma students with support from the Roma Education Fund.

Students and graduates participating in the survey consider education as a precondition to become what they wish and articulate connections

FIGURE 4:

Positive changes resulting from REP interventions on the state of secondary education

Source: university students / graduates survey



between education, employment and self-knowledge; they also view education as the source for developing concrete skills with immediate practical application, and a way to “escape the community”. However, their preoccupation is even wider - having more opportunities for better employment, proving to society that the Roma community is able to overcome obstacles and develop higher education graduates.

Students also observe that young Roma graduates have increased opportunities to develop their capacities and fulfill their rights as citizens.

The project brought many benefits to the young Roma students:

- ▶ **it is easier for young Roma to start and finish university studies / get a degree;**
- ▶ **improved access to employment in state institutions²;**
- ▶ **an opportunity to gain additional professional skills (learning foreign languages, IT training, communication, personal development etc.);**
- ▶ **tutoring activities enabled them to pass exams easier;**
- ▶ **enabled them to continue their education through postgraduate studies.**

The main benefit, emphasized by the vast majority of Roma students / graduates, was the increased number of young Roma who followed university studies. This did not result in positive changes in university or wider level policies. However, the general opinion among the students is that they need to involve in policy development and help future generations using the good practices from the Roma Education Project and the opportunities offered by Romaversitas.

² Many students / graduates perceive working in state institutions as an opportunity to contribute to the development and further impact of public policies.

FIGURE 5:

Impact of REP activities in university policies and practices: students' perception

Source: university students / graduates survey

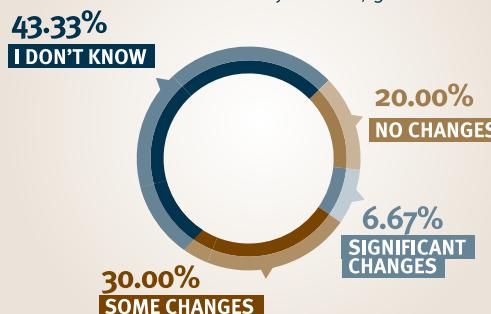
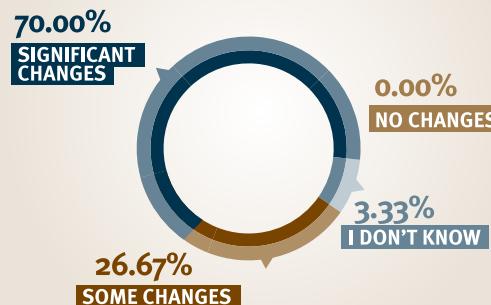


FIGURE 6:

Positive changes resulting from REP interventions on the state of higher education

Source: university students / graduates survey



The figures above suggest a proportional, similar situation as in the case of secondary school graduates' perception concerning university policies and practices, respectively the influence of the project on the overall state of higher education. University students / graduates consider the project as being influential in the state of higher education.

All Roma students mention, in one way or another, the significant and rich contribution of the Romaversitas project to their professional and personal future. This initiative, supported by FOSM, the Roma Education Fund and USAID, has been instrumental to strengthening university education among the Roma population. It provided the necessary resources and efforts to

increase the number of Roma students in higher education, as well as to help those enrolled to remain in education and progress successfully.

Their determination and well-thought strategy have improved the status and achievements of Roma university students, compensating the limited efforts of governmental bodies in resolving such issues. The majority of the Roma student beneficiaries has successfully progressed in their studies and achieved the standards expected in higher education. Romaversitas' achievements are even more remarkable since the university component of the Roma Education Project was deployed in the last years with exclusive support from the Foundation Open Society Macedonia and Roma Education Fund.

2.3. PERCEPTION ON GENDER ISSUES

Two thirds of the surveyed teachers consider the gender issue as being no longer problematic, whilst high school and university students / graduates show moderate views on this issue (56% say there are no differences between boys and girls).

Almost all interviewed teachers confirmed that girls generally are better achievers than boys regarding of the ethnic group, finishing school in higher percentage than boys. Consequently, this is the case with Roma girls as well.

FIGURE 7:

Perceptions of teachers on differences between Roma boys and girls regarding their career prospects and education status

Source: primary schools teachers' survey

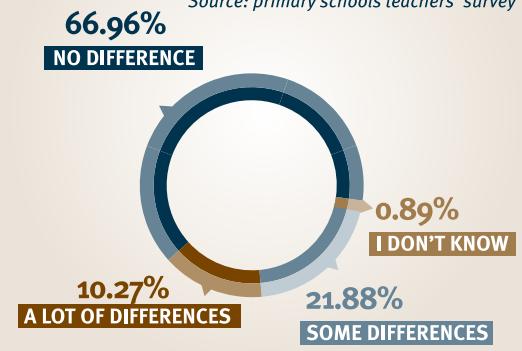
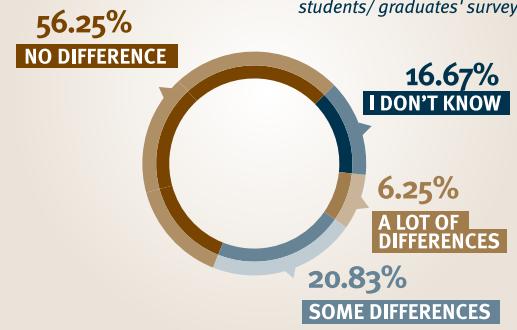


FIGURE 8:

Perceptions of high school and university students / graduates on differences between Roma boys and girls regarding their career prospects and education status

Source: high school and university students/ graduates' survey



However, some students expressed the opinion that young Roma girls face greater barriers in accessing education due to the patriarchal stereotypes and traditions on the side of their families about girls' role in society.

It was also pointed out by many interviewees that an indirect positive result of the project activities

is the decreased number of early marriages amongst Roma children and teenagers. Students reported that many girls no longer get married before finishing studies and/or getting a job. Those that do so, having entered the education system and dropped-out to get married, have a more positive attitude to education which they transfer to their children.

2.4. FETIJA'S STORY: BREAKING STEREOTYPES ABOUT ROMA GIRLS

Many people often asks themselves: "Where would I be in 5 or 10 years?" That question is the starting point for setting up your own goals, while responding to yourself in a manner that correlates to the answer you want to hear.

Fetija asked questions to herself in moments when she felt the need to seek answers about what she wants. The road to finding answers that are not already anticipated was not smooth a one, but it was successful.

A Roma girl coming from a small town and from a relatively traditional family. A lot of stereotypes in the community, prejudices about the others, oppressed by tradition and muted by the conservative attitudes and opinions. Today a degree holder, social work graduate, former scholarship beneficiary of the UASID's Roma Education Project. She often talks about the importance of finding a way to

awake the community and break the stereotypes:

The day I found my name on the list of admitted students - only one thought pass through my mind: "I am not going back home again"

She mentioned those same words publicly at the focus group with Roma students... but also in front of her current colleagues, teachers, representatives of various institutions, Ministers, Ambassadors, the President of the Republic of Macedonia... and her parents, during a public event organized by the Foundation Open Society Macedonia honoring the first generation of high school graduates who received scholarships.

She strived to gain an informal education over the years and still does. For many years, she fought against prejudice and stereotypes that still affect Roma women.

One special day she decided to stand in front of her community and present herself as a sex educator, speaking about the benefits and the risks of sexual and reproductive health, risk prevention and so on.

It was a shock for her family and the community. But her sincere intentions were presented in the right way, with the right words and the community understood. It was difficult, but they finally accept her now.

«That is a great success both for me and for the image of a Roma woman that is not brought up to this world to be a housewife and mother. She can even be a sex educator»

Fetija is a proud beneficiary of the Roma Education Project. She plans to continue her career as a sex educator, and contribute to the development of her community, as well to the emancipation of Roma women in Macedonia.

“I am illiterate,
but so proud that my
daughter taught me how
to write my name”

(Roma parent)

2.5. THE ROMA PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

Generally speaking, parents are children’s first educators and remain their key educators during their school career. It is clear that parents are the most important early influence on their children and the single most important factor in their later success and attainment at school.

The costs of education are basically the greatest obstacle for Roma parents, as most families face poverty, illiteracy and very basic living conditions. Enrolling children in primary schools, although it is free of charge, was difficult and challenging, whilst children were not adequately prepared for classes (their vast majority did not attend pre-school). Additional costs such as textbooks, transportation (to schools located far from Roma neighborhoods), school supplies etc. were also not affordable for the families.

Working with Roma parents was a cross-cutting issue, mentioned by all stakeholder categories. In the past, the project was less successful in involving more actively the Roma parents. They were reluctant to participate in the school activities, individual meetings, parents’ meetings

and different workshops. However, in its later stages, the project managed to include parents more effectively - which led to Roma parents overcoming their inner fears and improving their confidence and self-esteem. They express satisfaction with the project activities and their ensuing results, since they observed the way in which their own children undertake school tasks, attend classes - and their motivation increased.

The project assisted not only the Roma children but others as well. 10 years ago, Roma children showed very poor results in school. Now, with the assistance of the Roma Education Centers - and through the implementation of the Roma Education Project - the difference is obvious. Throughout the activities implemented jointly by the school and the local NGO, parents observed also that discrimination towards Roma children has decreased noticeably. Roma children are more interactive with non-Roma children and so far no conflicts were noted³. As the impact of the project activities extended beyond its proposed

³ As reported by parents in Skopje and Prilep.

“It is very important to persuade Roma parents to accept education and know that an educated person is more significant for him/her, the state and the society.”

(REC representative)

objectives, parents observed how children from different ethnic groups in school now establish friendships with each other and feel much more comfortable to interact.

Many Roma families stated that the Roma Education Center has a very special role in their lives: a second home for their children. Children from other ethnic minorities and marginalized / vulnerable groups come to the REC as they feel the Center within their comfort zone.

The education activities implemented in the Roma Education Centre were considered as the most important for the children’s development. School materials provided to the families significantly contributed to better education of children, particularly in the context of a poor economic situation. The parents also appreciate the extra-curricular activities in the schools; now their children freely participate in concerts, plays, parades etc.

The REC staff take care of the children: they visit their homes and call them to go to school, check on them if they are absent. Parents feel that the educators in the REC are more dedicated to their children’s well-being than the teachers at school.

The ability of parents to make the best choices concerning their child’s education is predicated

on having access to full information about the choices available. Among Roma parents of children, this is far from the case. The project activities helped them gain a better idea about what would be these choices and also strongly stimulated their involvement in education issues concerning their own children.

“The financial situation may not have changed since 2004, but parents finally understand the need for education”

(REC representative)

Involving the Roma parents in school activities is perceived as an essential aspect of the program. All Roma Education centers organized at least one event per month for the parents (i.e. a workshop, a presentation). In the past, it was not common practice for Roma parents to participate in the formal school bodies such as the parents’ councils. Yet, their participation became more structured - developing into one of the key REP outcomes which had a great impact on the connection between school and parents - and continues to increase within schools.

2.6. THE ROMA EDUCATION PROJECT: THE VOICE OF ITS BENEFICIARIES

Collecting the descriptions and quotes that people give of their experience within the project activities is often a powerful way of being able to analyze the difference made by the project. This sub-chapter of the report reflects on the above-mentioned assumption, and further illustrates the project's outcomes and community impact.

WHAT DIFFERENCES HAS THE PROJECT MADE IN THE LIVES OF BENEFICIARIES?

“With this (ref: the project) we come closer to their (ref.: Roma community) culture and we understand their behavior. We understand how much the family influences their cultural differences and we can understand why they behave in such way. Studying and education in general has not been pointed out at home as something important for their future and we face their life problems. Through this we become closer to the pupils and they become closer to us.”

(Primary school teacher)

“I like that the children study and that they receive scholarships.”

(Roma parent)

“The older generation of Roma students is actually the new generation of parents: they promote family values while explaining their children and the other members of the community the importance and usefulness of having a higher education.”

(University graduate)

“In our school we strive to bring (Roma and Macedonian) communities closer. This could be done very easy, by means of folklore and traditional dances. We organized after school activities in this respect, brought children together to sing and dance: Roma children improved their knowledge of Macedonian language, whilst Macedonian

.....

children learned Roma dances. Together, they even created dances of their own! When dancing, physical contact between children is very important, they learn to support each other and help improve their performance. It is a space for self-expression,

creativity and developing long-lasting friendships. The project could help obtaining more satisfying results in this by increasing the number of mentors, and giving special attention to talented children.”

(Teacher, primary school)

WHICH ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAM HAD THE BIGGEST EFFECT ON BENEFICIARIES AND WHY?

“Honestly, I think they perceive themselves (ref.: the Roma pupils) completely different than before entering primary education. When we were preparing the final part of the program of USAID and FOSM the presenter of the event was a Roma boy who led the event perfectly and who has all the needed capacities and abilities. And what they have gone through all these 8 years is giving them self-confidence, provides them with the wish to progress, to overcome life difficulties. Anyway, it is noticeable in their way of talking, in their behavior, in the way they perceive themselves.”

(Principal, primary school)

“I notice a bigger interest on the side of the parents. For many things they want to come and get informed. Before they were not interested enough and now they come on their own initiative if there is a need, which is very useful.”

(Pedagogue, primary school)

“Macedonia’s economic situation has not changed, things still need to change drastically. The figures we see on TV (ref.: economic indicators) are not nice, we don’t like what’s happening. But the Roma Education Project made things happen! And its “numbers” are growing and looking good.”

(REC representative)

* * *

“The project brought new methods of interaction and new ways of communication between scholars and teachers: it’s no longer « study, study, study! »; it’s « we are here to help, we understand your worries and needs, we will work together ».”

(REC representative)

WHICH WOULD BE THE KEY ACTIVITIES AND INTERVENTIONS TO CONTINUE, AND WHAT ROLE DO CONSTITUENTS SEE FOR THEMSELVES IN THESE EFFORTS?

“This project created the critical mass, the opinion that no child is lost and that every child can participate in this process. You only need effort and time.”

(Principal, primary school)

* * *

“A rich society is not the one that has rich people, but educated people.”

(Principal, primary school)

* * *

“I am not worried that the project will not continue. My concern is about continuing to have the same level of professionalism and responsibility among teachers, continuing to develop their skills and level of knowledge in working with Roma children and parents, continuing to support the parents, the community in general.”

(Principal, primary school)

“As we know what the younger generation needs, we are prepared and ready to contribute in a significant way to the new phase of the project. We should focus on continuing to build capacities, otherwise all that was done in the previous years will diminish its impact in time.”

(High school graduate)

* * *

“The project should continue for sure, I would not make any changes. Dendo Vas (ref.: REC in Skopje) should continue to act as an Education Centre, they do a great job. Maybe my older children (ref.: 12 and 14 years old) could also come to the center - they will soon need help in order to go to high school, now that it's mandatory... The school supplies are good but they should be distributed more often and if possible should include clothing and backpacks. Many parents think that the center should also support children who show special talent and skills in some areas (ref.: music, art etc.).”

(Roma parent)

2.7. MEET THE PARENTS: A FOCUS GROUP WITH PARENTS OF ROMA CHILDREN⁴

They come in large groups, two or three families, smiling and eager to meet the other parents. Some of their children are upstairs, playing cheerfully and a bit loud. Their educator is downstairs, explaining what is going on, introducing the guests and handing out cold mineral water. People laugh and joke, shake hands visibly happy to meet the visitors, eager to start the event. But we need to wait a couple of minutes...

The parents come here on their own, sometimes just to meet the social workers and educators whom they trust enough to leave their children several hours a day. Some years ago, it was the REC educators who were visiting the neighborhood, from house to house, persuading parents to send their children to school. It was a tough job, people were poor and had other obvious priorities: finding work, dealing with discrimination etc.

"At home, we have no room and no time for our boy's homework. He already comes here [at the REC] after school for three years and became an excellent student. Often he arrives 15 minutes earlier than the educator. I am very proud and grateful"

The large, grey car who stops in front of the center is packed with 7 or 8 people. Parents and children, each with their own tasks. Parents join the group and integrate immediately in the discussions.

"Not so long before I was happy that my children knew how to throw the garbage away. Now they know more than I used to know when I was of their age. They are motivated to go to school"

Teachers from the REP schools and REC educators are carefully assisting students to plan their study time, advising them regarding their school tasks and other activities. Their intention

is to meet regularly with the parents and inform them on their children's progress. *"It is unbelievable"*, says one of the loud voices in the group, *"now they try to persuade me to join the [school] council. I don't have time for that, I have to go find work. Now I am the only one working in the house!"* Involving Roma parents in such specific school events is a much more problematic mission though, as the main issues which are out of the project's control are the weak economic situation of the community and parents leaving the city and country for seasonal work opportunities.

"I am relieved from the things I should do with my children [laughs]. They come here [at the REC] on their own and the people from the center bring them home." Some of the parents half-heartedly admit they sent their children to school hoping at least that they will

⁴ The event took place in Kumanovo (REC Vrama Si), on June 20, 2013 and gathered 12 participants.

benefit from the opportunity to acquire key skills such as basic literacy, which can prove useful to the family as a whole: *"I am not ashamed to tell you I am illiterate. My youngest child is in first year of primary school and already knows how to read. The elder one is trying to help me read newspapers and letters from the local administration. He taught me how to sign my name!"* However, people learned quickly to integrate the presence of the school into their way of life, and children found the Roma Education Center to be a second home.

"10 years ago [in our neighborhood] we had less than 5 people who graduated high school. Now we have 20 graduates and most of them went to university. If this project was not achieved, they would've been on the street, begging or maybe stealing. But I don't even want to think about this, it is in the past."

Roma parents need financial assistance. They frequently emphasize the lack of school supplies, notebooks, textbooks, clothes, even computers. Some of them are provided by the center, but people want more: children need computers to stay in touch with the world, with its progress; they should be taken out of the neighborhood - to the zoo, to the countryside, to summer camps, to Skopje; they need to meet other children, from the other ethnic groups: Macedonians, Albanians, Serbs. *"We now believe that if there is an annual plan for 2013-2014, we should be consulted. The center should invite us, learn directly from us what we need. Our voice should be heard."*

Still, it's a long way ahead. Some of the people gathered at the center look at their watches, they need to leave. Others would

like to stay and talk more, share their experiences and tell the story of their children: *"Older children from our neighborhood didn't have the chance to be involved in such a project. I feel so sorry for them. I think this project should continue and every child from the neighborhood must be part of it."*

The gathering reaches its end. People stop by and share a final thought. They are still smiling, self-confident, talking loudly on their way out of the meeting room. Some of them know English and speak frankly: "This [the parents] is a generation that didn't have the courage to speak up, but the children upstairs will not be a lost generation. Our boys and girls have what it takes, much more than the others [Macedonians and other ethnic groups] think they do."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WHICH WOULD BE THE KEY ACTIVITIES AND INTERVENTIONS TO CONTINUE, AND WHAT ROLE DO CONSTITUENTS SEE FOR THEMSELVES IN THESE EFFORTS?

The key conclusion of this evaluation report is that the Roma Education Program was an invaluable experience that achieved remarkable results and has an outstanding potential for continuation and replication. The project met its objectives, benefitting from a solid budget, a tailored, pipeline approach, and covering (in terms of final beneficiaries) entire age cohorts.

Such a complex and ambitious project offers great potential lessons to be learned for its next phase, which may produce even greater coverage and addressability, yet building on its impressive impact and sustainable results.

First of all, it is obvious that the Roma Education Project - developed by the Foundation Open Society Macedonia, USAID and their institutional partners - has fulfilled its overall goals and provides the perfect ground for continuation of its activities. Although the sustainable changes produced by the project have reached the point of no return, there are many aspects which need further attention and support.

At first sight, the project seems to be expensive and covering a long period of time in order to produce results. However, the activities these results proved to be excellent and became successful experiences for all its constituents. Such a positive approach should not be interrupted and support should be sought at least until a critical mass of educated Roma parents is created. The rational and coherent way to continue in the future is by involving more teachers and more children in the activities.

The professional development events (training, workshops, and other types of assistance) addressed to the teachers and mentors provided useful and necessary knowledge and information to the schools assisted through the project. The project provided high-quality training for teachers, in sensitive yet crucial subjects (e.g. social justice, fighting prejudice etc.). All of them mentioned repeatedly the need for further assistance.

Almost every person interviewed by the evaluation team mentioned, in various ways, that the project should continue and increase its impact and coverage. If the project activities are stopped, schools will try to continue the implementation (fully or partly) of the activities - within the limits of their own budgets). But as each year schools receive new teachers, activities should continue considering the same objectives and - in particular - providing new training sessions for the new teacher cohorts.

Teachers acknowledge the fact that the project fills a number of important gaps and funded the implementation of activities that were primarily the government's task. They also highlight the importance and contribution of the additional extra-curricular activities implemented by the Roma Education Centers (subsequently, the necessary premises for such activities are provided free of charge to RECs). Still, in the teachers' view, schools should continue to play the main role in the project by engaging all of its constituents - and this is also the evaluator's opinion.

Most of the trainees - former participants at these events - agreed that the replication and extension (in other schools / cities) of such trainings are necessary in order to consolidate the project's

gains in terms of teachers' professionalism. Teachers also strongly believe that the future training sessions could be organized using their contribution (e.g. by setting up a formal framework of cooperation between schools) - to be used when providing assistance to other schools/communities with similar needs.

Support should be provided to cover the food for children in primary schools - a significant expense for numerous Roma families. Moreover, governmental support should be sought for the protection of the socially vulnerable groups. Teachers even suggest that the Ministry of Education and Science (with support from NGOs) should provide backpacks, school materials, food etc. for Roma children from poor families. Additionally, the project should focus on identifying all the talented Roma children and provide additional stimulus for their professional (or artistic) development.

All Roma parents participating at focus group discussions expressed confidence and high hopes for their future. This may be as well considered as a significant indicator for their positive self-perceptions, trust in their own capabilities and the success of the project activities.

“Education means having a choice”

(High school graduate)

While Roma parents are considered to be of utmost importance in the educational activities, teachers and mentors believe they appear not to be sufficiently engaged in the project. They consider that the inclusion of parents needs to continue and increase gradually since without their support the positive results from primary schools will be lost in the secondary school. Therefore, the project should have a special focus on activities targeting the Roma parents, increasing their awareness on the importance of the education, helping them understand its meaning and finality and assisting them in dealing with their children. Subsequently, the school events involving Roma parents should explore (and later include in their structure) more related topics, as well as observe their individual and collective issues.

Most of the Roma parents emphasized that their new definition of success is to have their children in school, finishing their studies and then follow by having an employment that provides regular income. The discussions with Roma parents, as well as with students (their children), also suggest a larger involvement of beneficiaries / stakeholders in taking action / contributing within the next phase of the project. All these findings suggest a positive and encouraging impact of the project at community level.

In the context of the mandatory secondary education, Roma parents think that the project should enable support to complete secondary school for those children who completed only primary school.

The parents also suggest - and the evaluation team highlights this issue - that the project should include more activities at local level for the promotion of the Roma people and their integration within the larger community.

In addition, REC representatives, as well as primary school teachers and parents, pointed out the better and continuously improving relations between Roma and non-Roma children and parents (in school and community).

High school mentors pointed out that the project should continue the way it was at the very beginning, referring to the way the REP project was implemented by FOSM as opposed to the way it is run now by the Macedonian Ministry of Education. This means that the same standards should be applied e.g. fewer students per mentor, payments for teachers, fixed eligibility criteria for application, the same trainings for all mentors, establishing regular and detailed work plans for working with the students. Project activities have been developed in a much more difficult way

“We are the generation
that motivates the others.
We must show the model of
good practice”

(University student)

after they have been taken over by the Ministry of Education: more students per mentor, less flexible eligibility criteria for scholarships, delays in payments etc.

The dissemination of the project results must increase and develop into public education campaigns which may possibly lead to the promotion of inclusive education. This process needs to be both long-term and strategic.

At the school level - according to the survey's findings - a lot of changes have been produced in 10 years of project activities. However, additional school-based activities - built on success stories and tailored to the particular situations and requirements - must be encouraged. It is important to observe how the project's excellent, long-term impact, along the particular results of the events, lessons learned, and case studies from school-based activities will be better harmonized with relevant institutions (ministries, inspectorates, other governmental bodies concerned with educational issues), and the ongoing reforms in Macedonia. The Roma Education Centers, along the REP schools, as well as Romaversitas and other project stakeholders, may actively help in advising and monitoring this process and, at the same time, aim for a number

of objectives clearly defined in the shorter term (related mainly to policy and legal interventions).

More dedicated work with all the stakeholders involved in the initiative will create an additional impact and positive results i.e. both parents and teachers should be included in joint training to address their mutual lack of confidence and also to develop a common approach. It is also important to create additional educational tools for parents and teachers, as well as to further increase the schools' capacity to interact with the community.

Keeping and developing quality education practices - including those promoted by the Roma Education Project - still need rigorous efforts and concerted contributions, with the involvement of all stakeholders: donors, specialized NGOs, schools, governmental bodies and agencies, former and actual direct beneficiaries (students, parents). Primary schools and high schools basically share the same set of problems (at national level) and require a demand-driven approach of the project's future.

Roma Education Centers - and the subsequent NGOs managing them - do not have the logistics and capacity to pursue financially-independent projects or programs. They work mostly with volunteers (which is notable and encouraging,

especially when these volunteers are former beneficiaries of REP), yet they have only a few employees and borderline working conditions. In order to produce a reliable and sustainable impact on their respective constituencies (most of them Roma communities or even neighborhoods), RECs need to focus on strengthening their own capacity, in terms of organizational development and fundraising. A critical level of maturity is reached when NGOs are able to initiate and support their own projects with minimal support from international donors or government.

This is the case with the Roma Education Project, which is planned to phase out in 2014. There is a serious concern regarding the capacity of RECs to ensure the continuity and sustainability of their activities unless support is provided from FOSM, local authorities or other donors. Generally, once funding is over - NGOs are demotivated and lack the interest for continuing their activities, as they have neither the funds, nor the personnel to do this on a regular basis. Most of the work in this area is done through volunteering. Networking - at national and regional level, with other NGOs from Macedonia or countries facing similar problems i.e. Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary etc. - could bring the necessary resources to the

organizations (and activists) who need them.

However, besides networking, a valuable resource which should be considered for ensuring continuation of activities is the large number of former REP beneficiaries who expressed loudly their willingness to contribute to the sustainability of the project - meaning that REP beneficiaries are now even more motivated and committed. Building such learning communities - based on the numerous positive achievements and capabilities of the project - could help sustain the desired level of quality in schools. The discussions with Roma parents, as well as with students, suggest a larger involvement of beneficiaries / stakeholders in taking action / contributing within the next phase of the project.

Roma Education Centers, therefore, strongly need to be trained for sustainability and their capacity built in order to reach the ultimate goal: EU funding. Constant cooperation between these NGOs and the Foundation Open Society Macedonia is offering them a large degree of credibility and visibility in the local community. It may also help them to find future sources of support and possible partners for future cooperation (besides the local government and project schools).

If the results of the project are less visible to the community, then the motivation and commitment of its main actors decrease rapidly. All schools involved in activities which resulted in models of good practice need to share the benefits of their great results with other schools and with officials. A better promotion (in the media, on the web etc.) of the project's success stories and its particular impact is highly recommended. Such an approach could greatly help in raising the awareness of the general public on the benefits and long-term effects of the initiative. It could also be instrumental in important project management

issues such as resource mobilization and/or the involvement of other important actors.

The final conclusion of the report is that the vast majority of the project outcomes have been achieved in a responsible and sustainable way, and the program itself is an outstanding model of good practice. Practically, most of the participants, past and current beneficiaries, as well as the Macedonian society expect a logical continuation and development of the project activities, having in mind the long-term commitment and positive approach of all its stakeholders.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

What lessons do we learn from the achievements of the Roma Education Project? This sub-chapter is an overview of the evaluation conclusions, based on the objectives that were set for the project and focuses on questions asked about its results, as well as on what can be improved in the future.

The Roma Education Project covers all educational levels, adopting a pipeline strategy which proved to be successful and its impact stretched on multiple levels of beneficiaries.

* * *

This initiative has proven that Roma children are capable of scholarly success provided they are given the appropriate conditions for learning, and following a strategic approach from its initiators.

* * *

Early childhood educational intervention is probably the most effective channel for securing sustainable educational success and diminishing the two huge disadvantages which the Roma community in Macedonia face: poverty and marginalization. The impact of parents with poor educational backgrounds is also an important issue which should be addressed more effectively in the future.

Training for principals and teachers was highly successful and praised by all participants. This, along with the activities developed in cooperation with Roma Education Centers, resulted into introducing the needs and priorities of the Roma children into school development plans so as to offer Roma students quality education, decrease the number of absentees and improve attainment.

* * *

One of the great results of the project is that Roma children function as messengers to their parents about the positive impact of education, and therefore education works both ways.

* * *

Nevertheless, Roma children need to have adult role models to look up to and learn from, so parents should be encouraged to become real partners for schools & RECs, and co-educators in the education of their children. They should be taken into account in decision-making and establishing general extra-curricular tasks, basically in everyday school life. The project reached a moment in which Roma parents rightfully claim to (and should) be part of school councils (where applicable) and other decisional bodies.

“I was very pessimistic at the start of the project, now I am a great optimist!”

(Principal, primary school)

Discrimination experienced in the past by these families - have often caused to remove themselves from mainstream society. This makes establishing relationships with them (school, community centers, NGOs) more challenging. Such relationships between schools and parents of Roma children should continue to be built upon trust, honesty and mutual respect.

* * *

The motivation of Roma parents is clearly increased when they (and their children) are included in the creative / inter-cultural workshops and see the results directly in the schools. It is much easier to communicate with them in such a way rather than invite them to meetings.

* * *

In areas such as Kumanovo, the main problems facing the Roma parents (and consequently their children) are the seasonal job seeking and asylum-seeking which results in taking children out of school, as well as living undocumented and in ghettos.

As interculturalism has been clearly marked as an asset of the project's impact, communication between Roma and non-Roma parents significantly improved during the project activities and should be given further the same support and importance as in the case of children - therefore constantly improving the inter-cultural environment. The other parents should be assisted in developing their knowledge about Roma history, traditions etc.

* * *

The Roma Education Project has had success in achieving its stated goals. Results for both preschool and primary school children are very positive and show that the Roma Education Centers have a crucial role in the successes of both groups. Their role has increased in time, as they now act as community centers and are perceived accordingly by the vulnerable groups they assist.

.....

The media should be used as a partner to promote the results and impact of the project (possibly in an extended way in the next years). The wide dissemination of the project outputs (and subsequent outcomes) should result in long-term awareness-raising campaigns - possibly developed at local level) which may lead to a larger impact: the promotion of non-discrimination and inclusive education.

* * *

In the same time, REP schools (involved in activities which resulted in models of good practice) need to share the benefits of their great results with other schools and with officials. They already do this, but in an informal, inefficient way.

* * *

The participation of other institutional bodies (local authorities, governmental agencies, other NGOs) and their possible further involvement and contribution in the project's progress increases the impact of the initiative.

The local and central authorities should be further involved in order to impact upon the public-policy level. In this particular moment, the primary stakeholders of the project are less aware of any changes at the decision-making level.

* * *

FOSM should develop and support strategies and funding options as alternative solutions for continuing such initiatives. Specific in-country and cross-country networks are needed in order to facilitate collaboration (teachers, parents, students).

* * *

As suggested by many project stakeholders, additional educational tools for parents and teachers - developed jointly by schools and Roma Education Centers - would increase the schools' capacity to interact with the community.

