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**Presentation:**

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Roma Education Fund:**

'Roma' is an umbrella term for the variety of Romani groups who might describe themselves as Roma, Gypsies, Manouches, Ashkali or Sinti. With a population of some 11 million, Roma are Europe's largest ethnic minority. There are Roma communities in almost all EU countries. Roma in Europe face greater hardship than the rest of the population. Many lack the education they need to find jobs. They often have shorter lives and reside in poor-quality housing.

- Romani women face a number of barriers in accessing education as reflected in higher illiteracy rates among Romani women compared to Romani men and significantly higher compared to non-Romani men and women.
- Barriers commonly faced by Romani women are based on high rates of poverty and patriarchal traditions which result in lower expectations for Romani girls to complete education. Romani girls are burdened with family obligations from a very early age.
- These barriers are further deepened by the common practice of placing Romani children in special needs schools for the mentally handicapped. Romani children are often wrongly placed in such schools on the basis of inadequate categorizing by medical commissions and lack of economic possibilities that force Romani families to send their children to special schools as these schools result in less expenses.
- Lack of personal identity and house registration documents needed in order to enroll in school are fundamental barriers for Romani children's access to education.
- In some regular schools Romani children are segregated along ethnic lines into Roma only classes.
- Language barriers and lack of positive models are still prevalent among large sectors of the Romani community and result in a further barrier for Romani girls to access education.
- According to a report published by UNDP which focuses on social vulnerability of Roma Refugees and IDP's, Roma fall behind national average of literacy rates. Enrolment rates at school also show an alarming situation. While 71% of eligible ethnic Serbian children attend school, only 24% of eligible Romani boys and 14% of Romani girls do.
- In Kosovo, Gender, like human rights, cuts through all sectors and has an impact on all issues related to politics, economics and culture. In addition to the high level of poverty and unemployment in Kosovo, women are at a disadvantage to men in terms of employment, education, opportunity for choice and active participation in public life. Gender disparities are greater after primary school, especially in rural areas.
- The situation is alarming amongst the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian: 78% of female and 62% of the males is out of secondary school and only 1.4% has finished secondary school.
- In Macedonia, the net enrolment rate of majority females to secondary schools is 74% while its only 13% for Roma females

- In Romania, only 3% of Roma women have completed secondary school, as opposed to 63% of women in the majority population;

### What works?

Given the current state of affairs, the **Roma Education Fund** believes that closing the educational gap between Roma and non-Roma is both a matter of urgency and top priority for improving the situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.

When seeking to improve Roma inclusion in education, it is essential that the actions at the local level be aligned with appropriate national policies. It is also essential to ensure adequate institutional and financial means so that national policies can actually be implemented. Furthermore, local initiatives must receive sufficient support from local institutions, such as schools, the education inspectorate, municipalities, local branches of line Ministries, and teachers' trade unions, to cite only the more obvious. **In many cases, policies and programs fail to have an impact because of the absence of an adequate policy framework or because they underestimate the very strong negative incentives built in to the education systems and the level of institutional changes that are needed.**

**In the case of Roma education, Roma participation is essential for a number of reasons. One reason is the need to empower Roma communities. Participation creates commitments and also motivation.** Efforts to open space for participation, if well managed, can create the trust and confidence that is required for successful programs. **A second reason why participation is important is that Roma parents tend to be less involved than other parents in school management and interaction with school staff. The experience with Roma education projects shows that low parental involvement can change very rapidly, and that it is not as much of a problem as some would maintain.**

The benefits of good policies are also confirmed by the first feedback from REF-financed projects. These include knowledge that:

- **Desegregated education** is better than segregation when it comes to improving the performance of Roma children in school, and that some models are working.
  - **Scholarships** are very important for secondary and tertiary education. We know that these scholarships have a strong impact on school participation by Roma, but they are more effective if mentoring is also included and advisory services are available.
  - **Enrollment** in one year of pre-education is probably the most effective investment for helping children to succeed in primary school and even beyond, in secondary education.
  - **Recognition of the values of culture** and indigenous language create an environment that favors integration.
  - **Placing Roma in special schools** or classes for children with learning disabilities is a disaster and **should be abolished without delay.**
  - More needs to be found out about: how best to organize the work of Roma mediators in education; how to ensure that teachers use what they learn from special training in multicultural education; and, how to set up an incentive system for school desegregation in decentralized environments.
  - Most crucially more needs to be understood and done to scale up what we know to programs that have national and regional impact. **Demonstrating the validity and cost effectiveness of some policies and programs requires studies and analysis, as well as in-country monitoring systems.**
- Cooperation among teachers, authorities and parents should be encouraged to promote girls continued education.

- Make scholarships available or provide subsidized fees, free transportation and required school materials for marginalized and poor families at all school levels, with special attention to the excluded and most vulnerable Romani families and ensure that at least half of scholarships target Romani girls and young women.
- Adult education programmes and literacy programmes should be carried out with a specific focus on Romani women's participation.
- Motivate Romani parents to enroll their children, especially daughters, at existing state educational institutions starting with early childhood development
- Promote the Romani culture and tradition in the educational system as a significant contribution to general culture and promptly erase any negative stereotypes about Roma and Romani women from text books

*Thank you for your attention!*