

**ROMA EDUCATION PROGRAM
FOSI-Macedonia**

E V A L U A T I O N R E P O R T
(For the Academic year 2008 – 2009)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Evaluation Conclusions

The pre-school component:

This research showed that the increase in the percentage of children who continue into the formal education system is an argument that the RECs entirely fulfill their task in the increasing of competencies of pre-school children and their preparation for timely commencement of the compulsory education.

The primary school component:

The project demonstrated success in retaining the high completion rate of 90 % among the regular REC attendees. However, this rate is lower than the one achieved in the course of last year. This decline is in line with the general downward trend in all project primary schools resulting from the introduction of external testing (not only among Roma students, but generally among all students); the number of repeaters and of drop-outs has increased at the school level. In addition to the financial reasons, the educational handicap of the parents, the persistent strong influence of traditional values, the low awareness level on the significance of education, the increased number of REC beneficiaries could also be listed as a reason for the decreased completion rate among primary school students participating in the Program. The number of children covered by direct education support in the centers has increased in comparison to previous years, reducing the time that the REC devotes to the students, i.e. the individual support that each beneficiary of the RECs should enjoy.

It is evident that the REC students show better results when compared to other Roma students, which is a testimony to the fact that the RECs perform well their tasks. However, the average student achievement still cannot go above grade 3, which is expectable having that the low-achieving students are the direct project beneficiaries. Such an achievement rate increases the students' vulnerability in regard to their further education. This weakness will become more pronounced when students enroll into secondary education. Preventive action must be taken. A combination of institutional solutions (REC Centers) with an aggressive intervention in the non-formal sector (in families and local self-governments) through educational and informative campaigns might improve the Program and bring about better results.

The secondary school component

The results point to a high rate of completion of 99% among the students in third year of secondary education. Given that this is a new group of students in third year of the four-year secondary general and vocational education, who have been selected according to their achievements from previous years, i.e. they were required to have at least a grade 3 average achievement rate, it can be assumed that this high rate of completing the school year is a result of the selection that encompassed "good" students. However, in light of the downward trend which has been indicated in primary and secondary education in relation to the decline of the average achievement rate of students and the increase in drop-out and repetition of the school year among all other students, the huge impact the REP has achieved on the successful completion rate of this group of students is undeniable.

A testimony to this statement is, among other things, the Government measure of providing all secondary education first year Roma students with scholarships starting from the 2008/09 school year, as well as the announced intervention for scholarships and mentoring in specific subjects

for all Roma secondary school students from years 1 to 3 as of the 2009/2010 school year. This decision to integrate the REP secondary education component into the system is the best indicator of success of the REP, which has been verified as an intervention that brings about results.

The university component:

The main goal of the is being continuously and successfully achieved and the objectives set in the Program have been realized in full.

The Program objectives: To provide tutor support for the Roma university students from Macedonia who are in need; To ensure supplementary academic support to advance the students' learning capacities; To provide open opportunities for small-size students' initiatives and projects, and To make other services available to all Roma students by maintaining the education hub (located in the centre of Skopje), by providing PC- and Internet access and by providing access to primary and secondary academic literature as well as other sources of information, have been achieved in full.

As regards the learning, the students are progressing successfully within their potentials. What characterizes them are their high level of motivation and their resolve to successfully complete their studies. The problems that emerge and that might impede the learning and the overall progress of the students are strong deterrents and reflect themselves negatively on the success of the students, but are yet not strong enough to dissuade them from studying.

The tutorship system is operating with success and has proven itself to be a good solution for overcoming the problems present in the mentorship system and it can be expected in the coming period to be accepted by the majority of Roma students.

Key Recommendations:

The pre-school component:

There is no doubt whatsoever that the good start is a precondition for achieving better results in the upper tiers of education. The interventions in the upper tiers of education can help, but for the most part deal with support (educational, financial) to those students who have managed to single themselves out from the majority of the Roma population. What happens to those who have problems at the very beginning? What happens to those who due to financial reasons or to low start-up competences do not enter compulsory/mandatory education or show poor results at its very beginning and drop-out? The answer to these questions is the key to a more drastic improvement of the education of the Roma children. However, the problem with the inclusion of children in compulsory education is too big for the potentials of the RECs. *More wide-ranging and stronger mechanisms and interventions must be sought which will aim at a greater coverage of Roma children at preschool age.*

The families and the parents are the key factor. Although in the last years, there is evidence of increased awareness of the Roma parents on the significance of education, the majority still needs additional support. So far, REP concentrated on institutional addressing of the problem through the establishment of the RECs. The non-formal area of intervention remained insufficiently covered. Experiences from communicating with the REC staff and with the families demonstrated that much can be done in this area, and it would be good to use the available experience to strengthen the REP with non-formal modes of action (education,

information and animation, cultural events, etc.) directed both at the children and also at their parents.

The primary school component:

Regardless of the positive trend achieved in the issues of regular attendance and achievements, it is necessary for the entire REP Program to be strengthened, since the achievements of the Roma students may be a significant success for them, but are still below the level of the other primary education students. Given that primary education is a start-up position which provides a respective level of competencies on which further education depends, additional efforts must be made to strengthen the start-up competencies of Roma students.

This research, too, shows that the local communities either do not have capacities (human resources or systemic ones) to suitably fulfill their role of supporting Roma students, or that this issue is very low on their priority list. This, by itself, requires continuation of the efforts for animation of the local communities and stronger promotion of the Roma issue. Such efforts need especially to be intensified in the communities where the Roma families are struck hardest by weakening of the economic potentials and by need for seasonal work.

It is the preschool and the primary school age that is the time when the foundations for further progress of these students in their education and for achieving success are built. Any deferred intervention would mean remedying the consequences caused by insufficient start-up competencies of the Roma students.

Data from this evaluation, as well as from the previous ones, point to the fact that the first two cycles are the most important ones for retaining the children in school and for their future success and progression. *We believe that the Program should in future focus more (if not exclusively) on working with Roma children from grades 1 to 6 (1-3 and 4-6).*

These two cycles are crucial for the further development of the students. The period from the 6th to the 12th year is critical for the psycho-physical development of the child and not only is the personality shaped in this period, but the foundation is created for its ability to learn (reading, writing, mathematical skills, abilities for analysis and synthesis, self-confidence, etc.) and its readiness to face subject-based upper primary education.

The secondary school component

As this component has the greatest potential as one of “the best practices” to grow/develop from a project into official government policy (of the MoES/Office) which would help address the problems of the Roma in/with secondary education, it appears that this part of the Program has fulfilled its mission. In the process of “taking over” and implementation of the scholarship distribution and mentoring/tutoring assistance to the Roma secondary school students by the state, it is to be expected that MoES/Office relies on the experience and lessons learned from the REP. *After the finish of the ongoing support to the Roma secondary school students, the current scholarship recipients (who will complete their secondary education in the year 2009/2010), the project should contemplate in future a different type of support for the Roma secondary school students that might be needed which will not be provided by the state, thus helping them to strengthen their competencies which emerged as problematic and which adversely affected student achievements, e.g. capacity building of soft skills - self-confidence, initiative, creativity, teamwork, making career decision, etc.*

The university component:

Romaverzitas needs to continue its work, which it does with success, and to continually take into account the needs and interests of the students in order to be able to meet them suitably and in time. It is obvious that in the coming period *it needs to ensure continuance and strengthening of activities of educational nature, especially the development of the students' soft-skills for which interest was expressed by the majority of students.*

The communication with the scholarship recipients needs to be strengthened and “more intense” work needs to be done with those students who have reservation in the abilities of the tutor to aid them. Maybe the establishment of a suitable office for career guidance and advice which would develop a more mobile and direct communication with the students could help resolve the respective issues.

The involvement of the students who are not USAID scholarship recipients proved itself to be a correct step and needs to be nurtured and enhanced.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Being aware of all existing problems and having experience in implementing Roma education projects for many years, the Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia (FOSIM), in partnership with 5 local NGOs, implements the Roma Education Program which addresses detected problems.

The ultimate aim of the FOSIM' Roma Education Program (REP) is facilitation of access to a continuum of quality education for all Roma girls and boys in Macedonia. The vision encompasses creative interventions and quality improvement in programs from pre-school through university education, ideally in multicultural settings, where Roma children are fully integrated in the learning community. Program activities focus on enabling pupils to succeed in learning, especially at transition points when Roma children and youth are most vulnerable to drop-out.

The Program embraces and supports the goals of the region-wide Decade for Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015, to which the Macedonian Government has already committed itself.

The Roma Education Program envisages the education system as a pipeline moving children from pre-school to university level of education. The education pipeline for Roma children and youth in Macedonia is small compared with the one of the majority and of other ethnic groups.

The **main goal** of REP is to help Roma students remain in the school system and improve their school performance and attendance, through positive interventions at all levels of education.

The objectives of the project are:

1. To prepare pre-school age Roma children for entering primary school
2. To improve the school performance of Roma students aged 7-15
3. To improve the school performance of Roma students aged 15-19
4. To promote equal opportunities and increase the academic achievements of Roma university students

The pre-school and primary school program within the REP are targeted and based in 5 Roma settlements: "Dame Gruev" and "Klanica" in Skopje, "Lozja" and "Sredorek" in Kumanovo, and "Trizla" in Prilep, where active Roma NGOs are trained to provide in their Roma Education Centers (RECs) educational and other services for members of the community.

The pre-school component focuses on improving Roma children language competencies in the Macedonian language used in public schools. It focuses on increasing the knowledge and educational experiences of Roma children so that they can begin primary school at less of an educational disadvantage compared with their non-Roma peers. It also emphasizes personal hygiene and health issues so that Roma children could be better accepted by, and comfortable with, other children.

The primary school component of the Roma Education Program takes action in two directions: the first one focusing on regular primary schools in targeted Roma communities, and the second one focusing on out-of-school activities for Roma students organized in non-formal Roma Educational Centers (students tutoring, assistance in homework writing, preparation for exams, educative and other workshops and activities for Roma parents) etc.

Extensive teacher and organizational development capacity building support was provided to the primary schools in targeted areas in the first few years of the project, in order to enable better integration of Roma children. Besides increasing the skills and knowledge of teachers for using child-centered methodologies, to each of the participating schools, Anti-Bias training was delivered. In addition, schools were also trained and provided with technical assistance for designing and implementing of the School Improvement Plan.

The Secondary School component addresses the needs of all Roma students enrolled in the first year of secondary education through an integrated approach of the following three sub-components:

- Scholarships for Roma secondary school students;
- School-based mentorship assistance to scholarship students;
- Additional academic support (English language and computer courses, trainings and summer camps for Roma scholarship recipients).

The scholarships address poverty barriers and meet the learning needs of Roma secondary school students. They secure family support and improve educational inputs such as textbooks, supplementary learning materials, transportation, food, clothes, etc. The mentorship assists Roma students in overcoming or at least alleviating deficiencies from the previous level of education. The program ensures that each student is provided with individual academic support and help in developing learning skills, addressing school-related and personal problems, as well as facilitating student integration into the academic and social life of the school. Mentors also support students in their subject studies, academic planning and active learning, and prepare them for State Matura.

The fourth component of REP is aimed at all Roma university students, offering scholarship for purchasing of books, travel costs, accommodation and other school equipment. The Additional Academic Support Program offers assistance in filling the educational quality gap from the previous level of education as well as provision of opportunities for all motivated students to develop their personal skills and to improve their academic performance. It is interesting to note that this is the only organized approach to a systemic support to Roma students in higher education in the Republic of Macedonia.

REP combines the successful Macedonia experiences of the Step by Step Program (a child-centered methodology focusing on children of up to 12 years of age), the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Program (RWCT, a methodology that challenges students of all ages to think critically), the experiences from the Roma Educational Centers (non-formal environments that support children in achieving better school performance), established and run by local NGOs, and experiences from the implementation of the Mentoring Roma High Schools Students Program and Romaverzitas Program for Roma university students.

Roma in Macedonia

Unemployment is most wide spread among Roma. According to OECD, 90% of the Roma population is unemployed, and according to a UNDP research from 2001, only 2% of the employed have education beyond primary, and 75% have incomplete primary education.

According to the Employment Agency of the RM, 17,672 unemployed Roma were registered in 2007, of which 7,410, or 42%, women. Of the total number of unemployed, 90.11% are persons without any qualifications.¹

The majority of the Roma population in Macedonia lives in 70 settlements, 65 of which are in towns and five of which are located in villages. In 82 percent of these settlements, Roma constitute the vast majority of the population. Some 10 percent of the settlements are ethnically heterogeneous, and in 8 percent, another ethnic community is the dominant majority.²

Ninety-five percent of the country's Roma live in urban areas and 5 percent in rural areas. Almost half (48 percent) of the Roma households are in the Skopje region. Only 2 percent of the country's Roma live in apartment buildings, 15 percent live in new houses, 46 percent live in older houses with acceptable living conditions, and 38 percent of Macedonia's Roma live in accommodations without minimum living standards. The majority of Roma living in urban areas are concentrated in poor ghettos or in suburban parts of towns, without minimum infrastructural conditions. These communities lack access to electricity, water, sewage system, roads, etc. According to estimates, about 70 percent of Roma have no legal documentation of ownership for the house in which they live, although 88 percent of them claim that they own their home.⁵

According to the human poverty index, 55.1% of the population faces some dimension of poverty. The Roma population in Macedonia is significantly poorer than the country's population in general. Some 88.8 percent of Roma live below the poverty line, while the overall national average is 30.2 percent below the poverty line. Furthermore, 96 percent of the Roma families do not own land, which indicates that they have no alternative way of providing food. The poverty of Roma is mainly due to lower levels of education and higher rates of unemployment.³

The Roma record the highest rate of malnutrition, poor health and child mortality. Most frequent cause of infant mortality are peri-natal causes and congenital anomalies, whereas as most frequent cause of U5 mortality injuries, congenital anomalies, malignancy and respiratory infections appear.⁴

Roma and education

Roma experience highest risk for exclusion from the education system. The percentage of Roma children who enroll into primary school still varies between 90% and 95%, depending on the source of the information, but only approximately 45% to 50% actually complete primary education.

According to information from a range of sources⁵, it can be concluded that enrolment into school for a Roma child does not automatically also mean its completion. Analyses show that the

¹ Social Picture of Macedonia, Government of the Republic of Macedonia, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Skopje, 2007,

² Roma Education Fund (2007), *Advancing Education of Roma in Macedonia - Country Assessment and the Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions*, Budapest,

³ Roma Education Fund (2007), *Advancing Education of Roma in Macedonia - Country Assessment and the Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions*, Budapest, p.13,14

⁴ According to the Strategy for Demographic Development of the Republic of Macedonia 2008 - 2015, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of the Republic of Macedonia, February, 2008.

⁵ UNDP; Gaber Damjanovska, N., Skenderi, S., Redzepi, N., Bojadzieva, A. and Cekregi, L. (2006), *National Vulnerability Report for Macedonia - Focus on Roma*, Skopje; Roma Education Fund (2007), *Advancing Education of Roma in Macedonia - Country Assessment and the Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions*, Budapest, FOSI Macedonia (2009), *Long Way to Knowledge Based Society: Macedonian education in the light of the EC Education and Training 2010 Work Program Benchmarks and Indicators*, Skopje;

drop-out rate of Roma children is exceptionally high; e.g. the entry rate of Roma children in primary education is relatively high (91%), but only 63% of them remain in school and continue their education after the age of ten (4th grade – end of lower primary school). Even more concerning is the situation in secondary education, which only 56% of the enrolled Roma students manages to complete. Only 19% of the Roma enroll into this education tier, whereas only 1.5% continues into higher education.

Data indicate that Roma probably constitute the majority of the ESL (early school leavers) in the country, which corresponds to their exceptionally low employment rate. 2002 census data reveal that 90% of the Roma population over 15 years of age have at most completed primary education (37.4%), have incomplete primary education (28.6%), are still in primary education (0.8%) or have no education at all (23.2%). Only 9.2% of the Roma have completed secondary education, with as little as 0.3% having completed some kind of post-secondary education.

Government measures

Alongside the economic, social and political transformation, the Republic of Macedonia had also to face the challenge of educational transformation. The attempts to modernize the education system resulted in partial interventions which were not systemic, uncoordinated and not learning objective-oriented. Lacking financial means and not being able to rationally allocate resources, the state failed to make successful interventions in the education system and to achieve results which would raise the quality of education to a higher level. Unfortunately, in this period, the only beacons of light were the excellent practices that could be seen in some of the interventions of the international institutions (foundations, bilateral programs, etc.) and domestic non-governmental institutions and organizations. Their presence in education and their constant pointing out to the crucial problems (and in that respect also to a large extent to the issues of the Roma) managed to raise the awareness of the general population as well as that of the government on the need for a more systemic intervention in the education system. In parallel, from the perspective of the Roma issue, this resulted in a number of researches, analyses and publications addressing the issues of Roma and education.

Roma Inclusion 2005-2015

At the initiative of the World Bank and the Open Society Institute Macedonia, nine countries from the region signed a Declaration for joining the initiative Roma Inclusion Decade 2005-2015, through which they committed themselves that in the coming period they would devote attention to greater inclusion of Roma in the social and economic life, with a special focus on their situation in the area of education, employment, health and housing.⁶

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy was appointed coordinator of all activities related to the Roma Inclusion Decade. In order to achieve greater transparency in the work and to increase the participation of civil society in this initiative, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy established a National Coordination Body, which has the task of coordinating the activities of the sectoral ministries in the implementation of the goals from the national plans of action that were developed as part of the Strategy for Roma in the Republic of Macedonia⁷ and the Roma Inclusion Decade.

Following the last parliamentary elections, another (new) ministry was established and minister without a portfolio appointed - a Roma, Nezhdet Mustafa, responsible for the implementation of

⁶ Social Picture of Macedonia, Government of the Republic of Macedonia, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Skopje, 2007,

⁷ Strategy for Roma, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje 2004

the Roma decade. It appears that his mandate is not completely clear and hence the perception that it coincides/overlaps with the mandate of the department for coordination of the decade at the MLSP. The Ohrid Framework Agreement resulted in the establishment of the Office for Promotion of the Education in the Languages of the Members of the Communities, whose director is also Roma.

In accordance with the implementation of the national action plans for the Roma Inclusion Decade⁸ and the Strategy for Roma in the Republic of Macedonia, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy implemented the following small scale projects: “Inclusion of Roma Children in Preschool education” and “Roma Information Centers”.

The Ministry of Education and Science has been implementing activities in accordance with the Action Plan from the Roma Inclusion Decade 2005-2015 in support to the initiative for elective acquisition of the Roma language. Nevertheless, the necessary (minimum) preconditions for the implementation of the elective subject Roma Language and Culture have not yet been ensured; nevertheless, the subject was introduced only in a very limited number of primary schools in the 2008/09 school year.

The assessment of the successfulness in the implementation of the activities envisaged in the action plans of the Roma Inclusion Decade 2005-2015 in the World Bank Progress Assessment Report⁹ indicates that, aside from presenting positive opinions of the institutional and structural component, “very little progress has been made in education”, in proactive involvement of the governmental institutions and that “the activities are exceedingly dependent on external funding sources”.

Among the systemic measures implemented by the state in the part of Roma education, the awarding of scholarships to Roma students stands out. In 2008, the Government secured scholarships for all Roma students in first year of secondary education. Although this measure represents progress in respect to the involvement of the Government towards improving the educational status of Roma, the impression still remains that this measure is not accompanied by a reasoned strategy for its implementation which would result in a much greater success. Only the scholarship, which by the way is of huge significance for the Roma students, is often insufficient to cause success if it is not accompanied by other supporting measures, such as: counseling, additional educational aid, instruction, mentoring, monitoring and recording, evaluation , etc.

In the course of this year, the MOES/Office announced that they would take over the continuation of the project in a somewhat amended form, i.e. the awarding of the scholarships in combination with mentorship/tutorship for all Roma secondary school students for the first up to the third year of secondary education, starting from the 2009/2010 school year. This decision points to the fact that the Government and the line ministry have realized the problems Roma students face in secondary education and have clearly recognized the positive experiences brought by the REP Program interventions (secondary school component) as the most suitable and best practice which needs to be taken over for further funding by the state. In this way, the secondary school component of the REP Program officially became part of the national system.

EVALUATION FINDINGS 2009

⁸ Roma Inclusion Decade - Republic of Macedonia, Action Plans, Government of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, November 2004

⁹ World Bank; OSI (2008), Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2007 Update

Goal 1: To prepare pre-school age Roma children for entering primary school

Early childhood development as a subject of state intervention is a very recent issue in the Republic of Macedonia. In the past, the focus of the efforts of the state was primarily on the institutional component of ECD which was addressed as an integral part of the care for preschool education. Although the scientists constantly stressed that the period from birth to starting school is exceptionally significant for the future development of the person, formal efforts by the state were missing. It is being constantly pointed out that in the period from 0 to 6 years the foundations and directions are laid for the emotional, cognitive, physical and social development of the person and that there is a threat of inadequate approach and incompetent dealing with the child's development, which can later cause a series of unwanted implications.

Unfortunately, the state did not have the strength to translate this awareness and these warnings into state programs and strategies that would facilitate timely action. Early childhood development was at the margins of the interests of the state, which was of the opinion that, with the establishment of preschool facilities, it satisfied the needs of this category of children and their parents. According to their design, the preschool facilities were primarily in the function of caring for the children while their parents were at work. The developmental component and the programs for stimulating the development of the children were of lesser interest. Thus, preschool facilities were opened in urban centers, where it was more common that both parents would be employed, with no facilities being available in rural areas. This situation is to a large degree also a result of the poor financial situation of the rural population, on one hand, and of the traditional attitudes that children at the age before commencing school should remain in the family and should be cared for by the parents, grandmothers and grandfathers, on the other hand. The rural setting, as a primary ambience for such traditional beliefs, gave a sufficient alibi to the state for this lack of care for the early childhood development.

That the state did not have a clear picture of early childhood development is confirmed by the fact that the responsibility for this issue kept being transferred from one government sector to another. The care for early childhood development was shifted between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Unfortunately, the dilemma, who should be in charge of this issue, is still present, as the responsibilities lie with one ministry, at the moment the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. This Ministry is responsible for the financing and management of the facilities, including the salaries of the staff, maintenance costs and the procurement of necessary materials.

On the other hand, the issues relating to the curricula guiding the work of the preschool facilities lie within the mandate of the Ministry of Education and Science (the Bureau for Development of Education). If we add on to this the mandate of the Ministry of Health over the health component of early childhood development, the picture becomes even more complicated. In addition, there has been for a long time no inter-ministerial or professional body responsible for the coordination of the activities. Therefore, it often comes to overlap in the responsibilities and to poor coordination of the activities; "Care for the children" and "education of the children" are still two separate worlds.

In respect to the infrastructure and equipment, the preschool facilities were for a long time characterized by a small accommodation capacity for greater coverage of children and an extremely poor availability of didactic material and functional elements.

The network of kindergartens today has 51 administrative facilities located in 40 municipalities; the number is approximately the same as in 1992 (52). In addition, in 7 municipalities preschool services for children are provided in facilities belonging to another municipality, and in one municipality the service is offered in other type of facilities. Bearing in mind that the territory of the Republic of Macedonia is divided into 84 units of local self-government, one can conclude that the coverage with preschool facilities in the Republic of Macedonia is unsatisfactory.¹⁰

Similarly unsatisfactory is the situation with the available accommodation capacities in the kindergartens compared with the number of children in the country in the age group suitable for attending kindergarten (children up to the age of 6); there are approximately 164,000 children below the age of 6, with the number of children attending kindergarten amounting to 21,000. This means that the coverage of children at a preschool age in organized facilities is only 12.8%, which is a very small percentage given that this education segment, although not compulsory, still is very important in the development of the personality of the children and their socialization.¹¹ Unfortunately, there is no precise data on the number of Roma children in preschool facilities. On the basis of separate project analyses, one can conclude that the number of Roma included at this level in the education system is very small.

In the opinion of experts in the area of education, it is precisely the poor attendance rate of Roma children in preschool facilities that creates the initial handicap, i.e. the poor start-up knowledge, which later, in combination with other factors, results in poor achievements in the higher tiers of education among this population group.

The connection between the preschool and the primary education was based more on age rather than curricular criteria.

Primary education of children from 6 to 14 years is compulsory and free, and the rate of coverage is over 95%, although there are indications, of a possible decline of this high rate in some rural areas, especially among the girls from the minority groups, especially Roma. Despite economic hardships, the government has managed to maintain the commitments for ensuring primary education for all children in their respective mother tongue (Macedonian, Albanian, Serbian and Turkish) and the learning of the Roma and Vlach languages as optional subjects.

According to the new legal regulations, children are enrolled in compulsory education at the age of 6, instead of 7, as was so far. This measure was taken due to the detected 12% children at pre-school age that do not attend pre-school institutions. Although there are no official data, research reveals that it is precisely the Roma children, reviewing the representation of the respective ethnic group in the total number, that make up the largest percentage of those children. In the opinion of educational experts, it is the poor attendance of Roma children in pre-school facilities that creates the initial handicap, i.e. it is the weak start-up knowledge that later, in combination with other factors, causes poor achievements in the upper tiers of education among this population. This measure is expected to increase their respective participation in the preparatory year, enabling this group of children an equal start in further education.

REP contribution

The activities in the preschool groups in the centers are aimed at improving the Macedonian language knowledge and proficiency, the basic knowledge of mathematics and development of social and cognitive skills. It focuses on increasing the knowledge and educational experiences

¹⁰ Strategy for Demographic Development of the Republic of Macedonia 2008 - 2015, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of the Republic of Macedonia, February, 2008.

¹¹ Ibid.

of Roma children so that they can begin primary school at less of an educational disadvantage compared with their non-Roma peers. It also emphasizes personal hygiene and health issues so that Roma children could be better accepted by, and comfortable with, other children.

The pre-school and primary school program within the Roma Education Program are targeted and based in 5 Roma settlements: “Dame Gruev” and “Klanica” in Skopje, “Lozja” and “Sredorek” in Kumanovo, and “Trizla” in Prilep, where educational initiatives were already in place and served as good examples. In these settlements active and interested Roma NGOs advocate for, and advance future projects in the community. In addition to educational services, they also provide services for members of the community.

The contribution of the Roma Education Centers (REC) has in this respect great significance for the successful educational and psycho-physical preparation of the Roma children for the start of the compulsory education. The data from the last years indicate that the percentage of children covered with REC activities that continue into compulsory education has been permanently increasing.

Table 1 presents data on the number of Roma children who participated in the REC pre-school activities in the period September 2008-June 2009, and those who later (September 2009) managed to enroll in the first grade of compulsory education.

| Tab. 1: REC Pre-school age Roma children and entering primary school | | First grade | | | |
|--|---|--|-------|---------------------------------|-------|
| | | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2009 |
| | | Total | Total | Total | Total |
| REC | Total number of children in the preschool /kindergarten group | 57 | 150 | 97 | 119 |
| | Enrolled in first grade | 51 | 138 | 81 | 116 |
| | Not enrolled | 6 | 12 | 16 | 3 |
| | Total enrolled in first grade (%) | 89.47 | 92.00 | 83.50 | 97.48 |
| | Name of REC | Number of children enrolled in first grade | | Number of children not enrolled | |
| REC | Vrama Si | 34 | | 3 | |
| REC | Kham | 15 | | 0 | |
| REC | Dendo Vas | 27 | | 0 | |
| REC | Romano Pro Angle | 36 | | 0 | |
| REC | Soncogledi | 4 | | 0 | |
| Total | | 116 | | 3 | |

The research conducted for the needs of the Baseline Study in 2004 showed that 84% of the children that had attended the Roma Education Centers in the previous year enrolled in regular primary schools, with this percentage increasing in the 2009 research to 97.48%.

A detailed analysis including distribution of children according to the REC location shows that the total number (100.00%) of those who did not enroll into first grade come from Kumanovo and attended the “Vrama si” REC. Analysis showed that these are children who had left for the purpose of seasonal work (2) and developmental delay (1). These families engaged into seasonal work as a means for strengthening their finances, together with their children who therefore could not enroll on time into first grade.

If these children are taken out of the calculation, as this is an isolated incident and in no way does it discredit the work of the REC, it becomes evident that the percentage of children enrolled in first grade, who had attended a REC is 100%, thus confirming the conclusion that the RECs have a significant impact on the improvement of the educational participation of Roma children.

Identifying the factors influencing the number of children enrolling into first grade, the following ones can be stated with certainty:

- the intensification of the communication to the families by the educators,
- the activities of the REC in their work with the children and the parents, and
- the raised awareness among the parents on the importance of education.

In the last two years, due to the increased number of children attending the centers and the limited number of educators, peer mentors were included in the work. They are sedentary school or university students who have previously attended the centers and they work with the children under the supervision of the educators.

As can be seen, although there is a legal obligation for enrolling all 6 year olds in this first level of compulsory education, there still are children who do not start on time, i.e. who are not enrolled. Due to the lack of precise and complete data, the total number of Roma children not attending the RECs and/or not enrolled in compulsory education cannot be presented. However, based on general data and previous years' experience, one can presuppose that the percentage of such children is still high. The increase in the duration of compulsory education can help but cannot definitively resolve the problem of the low attendance rate of Roma children in preschool facilities and their timely enrolment into compulsory education. Strong factors that negatively impact the timely enrolment of Roma children in compulsory education still persist. Frequently, even under the threat of sanctions (prescribed by the Law on Primary Education), parents do not let their children attend compulsory education on time. This trend is expected to decrease in future, but not to be completely eliminated.

The age of the research sample, i.e. the children at pre-school age, is not conducive to application of direct research methods. Therefore, it was necessary to gain insight into the situation through analysis of portfolios of children participating in the REC activities.

On the basis of the research, it can be concluded that the preschool aged children reflect the general situation of their respective families. Unfortunately, reasons such as: too many working hours (grey economy, seasonal work), unemployment and the low educational level of the parents still prevail. The state is most frequently and generally to blame for the problems their children have in education, without them attempting a self-critical view of the problem.

This research showed that the increase in the percentage of children who continue into the formal education system is an argument that the RECs entirely fulfill their task in the increasing of competencies of pre-school children and their preparation for timely commencement of the compulsory education. However, the problem with the inclusion of children in compulsory education is too big for the potentials of the RECs. More wide-ranging and stronger mechanisms and interventions must be sought which will aim at a greater coverage of Roma children at preschool age.

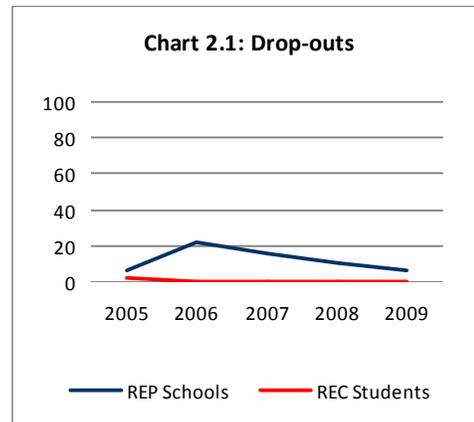
Goal 2: To improve the school performance of Roma students aged 7-15

General remarks: The research covered 340 (148 male, 192 female) primary school Roma students - Roma Centre visitors. Given that the picture of the general situation of the Roma families has not changed in the country, the basic characteristics of Roma students presented in previous research still remain. The above is in compliance with the general trends and characteristics of the Roma population in the country. The lack of finances, unregulated family relations and poor living conditions, are the main characteristics of the population covered by the Roma Education Program.

For the purposes of the Evaluation, the data received from the Roma Centre students are compared with data from all 515 (265 male, 250 female) primary school Roma students from the REP primary schools.

Progression: From the total number of students enrolled in primary education who benefited from the services of the RECs, only one student (male) dropped out of school. Chart 2.1 presents the positive trend of drop-out decrease that started in 2006. This trend is not evident only among REC students, but also among the overall number of students in the REP schools.

The drop-out rate out (for various reasons: too old, moved away, no valid marks i.e. did not attend school, sick for the whole period, deregistered, expelled from school, etc.) at the level of REP schools, among the total number of their Roma¹² students amounted to 36 (17 male and 19 female) or 6.99%, which is a better ratio than the one ascertained in 2006 (21.59%), 2007 (15.68%) and 2008 (9.96 %).



The positive declining drop-out trend can evidently be attributed to the decrease in the drop-out rate of the REC students. This positive effect of the REC students is a clear indicator of the successful work of the RECs.

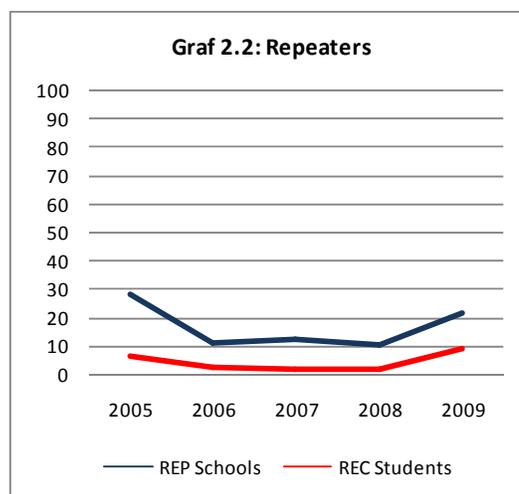
In contrast to the positive trend of decreased drop-out, the rate of repetition has evidently deteriorated in the course of this year. (Chart 2.2) The total number of repeaters among the REC students amounted to 31 students (13 male and 18 female), i.e. 9.11% of students repeated the grade, with this number reaching 111 among all REP students (70 male and 41 female) or 21.55%.

The increase in the number of repeaters diverged in 2009 from the positive trend evidenced in the previous years. Why?

This question is difficult to answer without undertaking a deeper situation analysis. Given that this feature is not present only among the REC students, but generally at a school level, and is accompanied by a deterioration of the grades awarded to measure and record student achievements, we can draw the conclusion that this is only a consequence of the work of the RECs, or that this issue pertains to a specific cohort, or that the students have suddenly stopped learning. It is evident that the causes can not be detected if the analysis limits itself only to the RECs and the schools.

¹² This number also includes the REC students.

We are inclined to believe that this increase in the number of repeaters can to a large degree be traced back to the government initiative of introducing external student assessment in all subjects at the end of the 2008/2009 school year. The reason for this initiative was the intention of the government to establish whether students are being awarded undeserved grades in primary and secondary education. One of the goals this external student assessment was expected to achieve was to ascertain whether there was a discrepancy between the grades obtained at the external assessment and the grades the students had received in a specific subject by a specific teacher in the course of the school year and what this discrepancy was. In the justification of the initiative, it was stated that the teachers with the smallest discrepancies would be rewarded, whereas those with the highest discrepancy rates would be punished. This government initiative was annulled by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Macedonia. Nevertheless, in the period before the annulment by the Court, the assessment had already taken place in a number of primary schools, and although it was not brought to completion, it still caused significant turbulences in the primary and secondary schools. Although definite evidence cannot be obtained, the trend of more rigorous assessment procedures by teachers is evident in these schools, and the criteria for the assessment of student achievements were set at a much higher level. In an environment where the standards of student achievements were not in a clear correlation with the respective equivalent, namely the grade, teachers opted for awarding lower grades so as to avoid the threat of being qualified as awarding unmerited grades and of being penalized.



Of course, this is only an assumption as data to verify it do not exist. However, the decrease of the average achievement rates and the increase in the number of repeaters *evident at a national level*, indirectly speak in favor of the statement that this initiative had an influence over the work of the schools. Hence, the increase in the number of repeaters in the REP schools in general and among the REC students as well can be viewed as a consequence, among other thing, of this initiative. A deeper analysis of this manifestation, which to a large extent exceeds the scope of this evaluation, could yield more precise arguments on the merit of these conclusions.

It is encouraging to see the further decrease of the drop-pout rate and the continuation of the positive downward trend from the previous years. The retention of the Roma students in the system is one of the more taxing tasks the REP Program is addressing. Although the students face a number of challenges, they still continue their education. This is significant. The fact that they stay in the system is a sure guarantee that they will continue their mandatory education. In this respect, the work of the RECs has made an invaluable contribution.

From the perspective of detecting the critical moments contributing to drop-out among Roma students, this year has seen a repetition of the situation from last years, when the majority of all REP students dropped out in the period between the 5th and the 8th grade. In this case, 69.56% of the entire drop-out between the 5th and the 8th grade occurred in the course of the 5th grade and at the transition into the 6th grade. It is encouraging to see that the REC students are an exception to this trend, as no student has dropped out in the period between grades 5 and 6. The only drop-out is one student in grade 8.

The same is true for the repeating of a school year; it is precisely in this period, at the transition between the 5th and the 6th grade that close to 50.00% of all repetition occurs. This is also the case with the REC students; the bulk of the repetition of the year occurred in the same period, i.e. 47.37% of all repeaters from grades 5 to 8 are students repeating grade 5.

Tab. 2.1: All students compared to RECs beneficiaries 2004-2009

| | Grade | ENROLLED | | | DROP-OUTS | | REPEATERS | | GRADUATES | |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|-------|---------------|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------|
| | | Total | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| 2004/5 | All Roma students in REP primary schools | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 460 | 258 | 202 | 17 | 12 | 86 | 44 | 155 | 146 |
| | 5 th -8 th grade | 100.00 | 56.09 | 43.91 | 58.62 | 41.38 | 66.15 | 33.85 | 51.49 | 48.51 |
| | | 100.00% | | | 6.30 | | 28.26 | | 65.44% | |
| | | Students attending the REC | | | | | | | | |
| | 217 | 107 | 110 | 3 | 2 | 11 | 3 | 93 | 105 | |
| 5 th -8 th grade | 100.00 | 49.31 | 50.69 | 60.00 | 40.00 | 78.57 | 21.43 | 46.97 | 53.03 | |
| | 100.00% | | | 2.30% | | 6.45% | | 91.24% | | |
| 2005/6 | All Roma students in REP primary schools | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 491 | 259 | 232 | 69 | 37 | 22 | 33 | 163 | 167 |
| | 5 th -8 th grade | 100.00 | 52.75 | 47.25 | 65.09 | 34.91 | 40.00 | 60.00 | 49.39 | 50.61 |
| | | 100.00% | | | 21.59% | | 11.20% | | 67.21% | |
| | | Students attending the REC | | | | | | | | |
| | 239 | 106 | 133 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 103 | 131 | |
| 5 th -8 th grade | 100.00 | 44.35 | 55.65 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 66.67 | 33.33 | 44.02 | 55.98 | |
| | 100.00% | | | 0.00% | | 2.09% | | 97.91% | | |
| 2006/7 | All Roma students in REP primary schools | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 472 | 258 | 214 | 42 | 32 | 40 | 19 | 176 | 163 |
| | 5 th -8 th grade | 100.00 | 54.66 | 45.34 | 56.76 | 43.24 | 67.80 | 32.20 | 51.92 | 48.08 |
| | | 100.00% | | | 15.68% | | 12.50% | | 71.82% | |
| | | Students attending the REC | | | | | | | | |
| | 251 | 122 | 129 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 128 | 118 | |
| 5 th -8 th grade | 100.00 | 48.61 | 51.39 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 80.00 | 20.00 | 52.03 | 47.97 | |
| | 100.00% | | | 0.00% | | 1.99% | | 98.01% | | |
| 2007/8 | All Roma students in REP primary schools | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 472 | 242 | 230 | 21 | 26 | 34 | 15 | 180 | 187 |
| | 5 th -8 th grade | 100.00 | 51.27 | 48.73 | 45.13 | 54.87 | 69.39 | 30.61 | 49.05 | 50.95 |
| | | 100.00% | | | 9.96 % | | 10.38 % | | 77.75 % | |
| | | Students attending the REC | | | | | | | | |
| | 257 | 117 | 140 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 115 | 136 | |
| 5 th -8 th grade | 100.00 | 45.53 | 54.47 | 0 | 100.00 | 50.00 | 50.00 | 45.82 | 54.18 | |
| | 100.00% | | | 0.39 % | | 1.56 % | | 97.67 % | | |
| 2008/9 | All Roma students in REP primary schools | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 515 | 265 | 250 | 17 | 19 | 70 | 41 | 178 | 190 |
| | 5 th -8 th grade | 100.00 | 51.46 | 48.54 | 47.06 | 52.94 | 63.06 | 36.94 | 48.37 | 51.63 |
| | | 100.00% | | | 6.99%¹³ | | 21.55% | | 71.46% | |
| | | Students attending the REC | | | | | | | | |
| | 340 | 148 | 192 | 1 | 0 | 13 | 18 | 134 | 174 | |
| 5 th -8 th grade | 100.00 | 43.53 | 56.47 | 100.00 | 0 | 41.94 | 58.06 | 43.51 | 56.49 | |
| | 100.00% | | | 0.30% | | 9.11% | | 90.59% | | |

If we know that the highest drop-out rate among the Roma students occurs exactly at the progression from the fifth to the sixth grade, the move from one location to another has little bearing in this case. The reasons for this remain the same, i.e. until the fifth grade children do not repeat the grade irrespective of the marks/success that the students achieve. However, starting from the fifth grade progression depends on the student achievements. Thus, the majority of the students with weak achievements do not manage to progress into the higher (sixth) grade, i.e. repeat the fifth grade or simply drop out from school.

¹³ Two students (1 male and 1 female) dropped out of school to being over-age.

If the data from the initial study are taken into account, which indicated that more than 80% of Roma students dropped out in the course of primary or did not continue into secondary education, *then the current results point to an exceptionally positive contribution of the REP in the elimination of the retention and progression problems.*

The analysis of the results by gender gives an answer to the dilemma that arose in the 2005 evaluation, i.e. whether repetition appears more commonly among the female population. The results indicate no significant discrepancies in the number of repeaters between the male (8.78%) and the female (9.37%) students. A comparison with the results of the Roma students who did not attend the RECs (26.42% among the male and 16.40% among the female students), reveals that non-REC students challenge this dilemma. On the contrary, male students who did not attend the RECs are more vulnerable in respect to repetition. From this perspective, the influence of the RECs is of great importance. The research undeniably confirmed that the resolving of this problem is to a large extent due to the influence of the REC and the teaching staff and the increased awareness of the Roma families on the necessity of education for the female population.

The role of the RECs and the schools, given the character of their work (direct contact and direct assistance) has a prominent place in the changing of the situation in the education of Roma students.

In addition to the REP influence, additional stimulus for the change of the situation comes also from the influence of other NGOs, especially the Roma ones, the government measures for overcoming the weaknesses in the education sphere among the vulnerable groups and the overall campaign for overcoming the problems of the Roma that was conducted in the country in the last period. However, it is evident that the government measures hardly yield results if they are not accompanied by activities in the field, as is the case with the REP. A confirmation for this statement is the fact that the drop-out rate is much higher among students that were not attending the REC (Table 2.2).

Tab. 2.2: Roma Students not attending RECs

| 2008/9 | Grade | ENROLLED | | | DROP-OUTS | | REPEATERS | | GRADUATES | |
|--------|--|----------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|----|
| | | Total | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| | 5 th -8 th grade | 175 | 117 | 58 | 16 | 19 | 57 | 23 | 44 | 16 |
| | 100.00 | 66.86 | 33.14 | 47.06 | 52.94 | 71.25 | 28.75 | 73.33 | 26.67 | |
| | | 100.00% | | | 20.00 | | 45.72 | | 34.28 | |

The data reveals that even 65.72% of these students did not make the progression into the higher level of education, i.e. either dropped out (20.00%) or repeated the grade (45.75%). This drop-out and repetition rate is the highest one in the country. Why is this so?

In order to answer this question, we must have precise records and statistical data. Unfortunately such records and data are not available in the country. The State Statistical Office does not distribute any other data except the total number of enrolled students according to ethnic affiliation. On the other hand, the services in charge of monitoring teaching and the situation in primary education rarely check whether the students that are enrolled and registered as regular students in primary education attend regularly, whether they are sick and/or whether they attend school at all or are registered only fictitiously as a number (with a name and surname) in the school ledger. Given the high drop-out rate of the students who are treated in the school books as “does not attend classes” or “has not receive any marks”, chances are that these students have not even appeared in school, but have not been deregistered and are still counted as students of the respective school. One needs to bear in mind the legal regulations, whereby the school has no

mechanisms to deregister such students. This is the cause for the difference between the registered students and the real number of students that attend school.

“The curse” of the 5th grade is the main factor in this case, too. Very often, many children do not continue their education beyond the first level of primary school (1st to 4th grade), although the school automatically registers them in the next grade. The reasons can be various, ranging from lack of finances to continue education, poor start-up knowledge acquired in lower primary school (1st to 4th grade), to traditional attitudes that it is enough for the children to be literate, to command basic reading, writing and mathematics skills, and they do not need to continue their education further. In order to determine the situation of the considerable number of Roma students who do not attend school at all, it is necessary to conduct a focused research which would point out the real reasons for the occurrence of this problem.

Another manifestation is present in this research, same as in the previous ones. Part of the students, although registered as drop-outs, belong to the category of “over-age” students. These are namely students who have been deregistered due to being over the approved age for primary school attendance. These overage students are a logical result of a trend, common in poor communities, especially the Roma ones, to send children to school when they are already too old. In this way, these children become too old for education while they are in primary school and do not complete their education. After leaving the school they have two choices: 1) to enroll into schools for adults and complete primary education, or 2) not continue their education at all. Thus, the regular statistical reports of the state services always contain a category “persons with incomplete primary education”.

Regular attendance:

Table 2.3 presents data on regular attendance and success of REC students and of all Roma students in the REP schools. It is evident that in regard to attendance/absenteeism, the REC students have a lower rate of absences that the average rate at the level of REP schools, i.e. that they have progressed more in comparison with the other students. The advantage of the REC students would be even more visible if the total number of absences included those of the students who had left schools or repeated the grade, and who are to be found among the students that do not attend the RECs.

In respect to the gender distribution, the trend remains of boys having a higher numbers of absences than girls.

Tab. 2.3: Comparative presentation of absences and the average success rate of the Roma students¹⁴

| 2005 | Absences | | | Average success |
|--|----------|-----------|-------|-----------------|
| | Excused | Unexcused | Total | |
| REP primary schools | | | | 2.58 |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 51.82 | 35.52 | 87.34 | |
| Students attending the REC | | | | 2.73 |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 60.25 | 26.55 | 86.80 | |
| 2006 | Absences | | | Average success |
| | Excused | Unexcused | Total | |
| REP primary schools | | | | 2.79 |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 52.47 | 26.35 | 78.79 | |
| Students attending the REC | | | | 2.95 |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 49.96 | 19.35 | 69.31 | |

¹⁴ Students that left school or repeated the grade are not included in the calculation.

| 2007 | Absences | | | Average success |
|--|----------|-----------|--------|-----------------|
| | Excused | Unexcused | Total | |
| REP primary schools | | | | 2.70 |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 54.88 | 30.81 | 85.69 | |
| Students attending the REC | | | | 2.85 |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 54.68 | 22.81 | 77.49 | |
| 2008 | Absences | | | Average success |
| | Excused | Unexcused | Total | |
| REP primary schools | | | | 2.59 |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 72.15 | 44.01 | 116.16 | |
| Students attending the REC | | | | 2.65 |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 67.23 | 28.64 | 95.87 | |
| 2009 | Absences | | | Average success |
| | Excused | Unexcused | Total | |
| REP primary schools | | | | 2.73 |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 56.88 | 34.09 | 90.97 | |
| Students attending the REC | | | | 2.90 |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 50.74 | 30.66 | 81.40 | |

Taking a comparative view, the REC students are better this year than the students in the REP schools in general. Unlike last year, there is improvement in respect to absenteeism. The average number of absences, justified and unjustified, for all Roma students in the REP schools is 90.97, which is an improvement in comparison with 2008 (116.16), whereas for the students attending the RECs, the absences are as low as 81.40 per student. Expressed in days, it amounts to approximately 11 days in the course of the entire school year.

The reasons for this manifestation can be of different nature, but the most plausible one is linked to the general trend of increased absenteeism from primary school at a national level. If we combine this with the poor financial potential of the population, especially the Roma, it becomes likely that the trend of increased absenteeism among the Roma students will continue in the coming period as well.

At the same time, we could provide another reason affecting not only the achievements, but also the absenteeism, the repeating of the school year, as well as the successful completion of the education. Namely, the number of students attending the RECs in the course of this school year is bigger, whereas the number of REC staff has remained unchanged. This affected the work of the RECs and played a part in the reduction of the opportunities for individual work with the students and for contacts with the families.

If we take a look at the overall distribution of absences, we will notice an uneven spread, i.e. there is a division of students into those with a high number of absences and those with a low number of absences. In the second category of students, it is noteworthy to mention those with no absences at all in the whole of the last school year. As a rule, high achievers always have a lower rate of absence.

It is evident that this, still persisting, characteristic of Roma students is one of the biggest impediments to achieving better learning success and progress in learning. The reasons for this can be sought in the traditional approach to education among this population group, the specific value systems, poor start-up knowledge, lack of discipline and of a more serious attitude towards education, seasonal work of the students, but without doubt the single most hampering causes is the poor financial potential of the families.

Verification of these statements can be found in the data relating only to Roma students who did not attend the RECs.

Tab. 2.4: Absences and the average success rate of the Roma Students not attending RECs¹⁵

| 2009 | Absences | | | Average success |
|--|----------|-----------|--------|-----------------|
| | Excused | Unexcused | Total | |
| 5 th -8 th grade (average) | 88.38 | 51.73 | 140.11 | 2.31 |

Table 2.4 paints an exceptionally grim picture of the absenteeism of students who did not use the services of the RECs. The calculation does not include the drop-outs who as a rule are responsible for the bulk of absences. If we add this category of students, then the picture becomes even grimmer.

The research clearly leads to the conclusion that the REC students upgrade the average absenteeism and achievement rates of the REP schools. It is evident that the Roma students are need of preventive additional assistance in order to overcome this problem. The better performance of the REC students in regard to absenteeism and achievements is the best confirmation thereof.

In addition to the insufficient educational support, especially among students who did not attend the RECs, other causes of the high number of absences among all Roma students could be listed, all of which have been confirmed in the previous years' evaluations. The poor financial situation among part of the Roma families prevents additional allocation of resources from the family budget for the education of the children, but also causes the children to be engaged during the school year in seasonal work or other types of work, with the aim of improving the family budget. The children's seasonal work for appropriate wage (picking grapes, vegetables, etc.) is most present in autumn, more precisely at the beginning of the school year. Such work not only increases the number of absences, i.e. decreases the regularity of the attendance, but also additionally impacts the future success of part of the children for the duration of the entire school year, as they miss out on a significant part of the learning material, miss out on the basis and have great difficulties in catching up with the other children afterwards. In the end, it all results in a low success rate in learning.

This conclusion is supported by the fact that the RECs in principle provide assistance primarily to students coming from lower social status families. The financial weakness of these families to a large extent determines the behavior of the children and in the majority of cases puts them in a position of "grown-up" children expected to take the responsibility of an equal contribution to the family budget. The engagement of these children in seasonal work and grey economy is frequent. A review of school absenteeism reveals that the beginning and the end of the school year are the critical periods when most of the absences are recorded. It is precisely in those periods that the seasonal activities of whole Roma families occur. Whether the financial gain is the strongest reason for the increases on number of absences among these students, remains still to be proven. That could be a subject of a special study which to a large extent can help the Rap's more efficient implementation in primary education.

¹⁵ Students that left school or repeated the grade are not included in the calculation.

Achievements:

A comparative review of the achieved success of Roma students shows certain oscillations. (See: Table 2.5) If the REC students achieved an average mark of 2.73¹⁶ in 2005, for it to go up to 2.95 in 2006, the average mark declined to 2.85 in 2007 and 2.65 in 2008, only to climb up again to 2.90 in 2009. This trend is not characteristic only of the REC students, but also of all Roma students (2.58 in 2005, 2.79 in 2006, 2.70 in 2007, 2.59 in 2008 and 2.73 in 2009). The same can be noticed among students who did not attend the RECs (from 2.47 in 2006, 2.29 in 2007, and 2.32 in 2008 to 2.31 in 2009). Evidently, this is a trend occurring among all students.

Tab. 2.5: Comparative presentation of the average success rate of the Roma students¹⁷

| SCHOOL SUCCESS | All Roma students | Students not attending the REC | Students attending the REC |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2006 | Average school success rate / mark | | |
| 5 th -8 th grade | 2.79 | 2.47 | 2.95 |
| 2007 | | | |
| 5 th -8 th grade | 2.70 | 2.29 | 2.85 |
| 2008 | | | |
| 5 th -8 th grade | 2.59 | 2.32 | 2.65 |
| 2009 | | | |
| 5 th -8 th grade | 2.73 | 2.31 | 2.90 |

What are the reasons for this? We know that in 2005 and 2006, the students that were interviewed complained about bad living conditions and everyday problems they were facing (lack of textbooks, lack of learning materials and stationery, bad learning conditions; lack of clothing and footwear, poor finances, lack of separate room for learning, problems with reading and writing, teachers talking too fast and the poor command of the Macedonian language).

In addition, we know that the trend of financial weakening of the population in the country is permanently increasing, especially among the Roma population. On the other hand, an increase of seasonal work of the Roma has been evidenced in 2006/07 and 2007/08 as a consequence of financial impoverishment and the need for strengthening the family budget. It needs to be mentioned that the Roma are in a specific situation which is characterized by a high degree of unemployment, which according to unofficial data is over 90%, lack of farmland and high participation in the grey economy. Thus, it should not be surprising that precisely this population is increasingly involved in seasonal work. Given that the seasonal engagements are opportunity dependent (depend on the need for workforce), they vary and are not constant every year.

We believe that this is the strongest factor for the decline in the learning achievements of Roma students in 2009.

Conclusions and recommendations:

The project demonstrated success in retaining the high completion rate of 90 % among the regular REC attendees. However, this rate is lower than the one achieved in the course of last year. This decline is in line with the general downward trend in all project primary schools resulting from the introduction of external testing (not only among Roma students, but generally among all students); the number of repeaters and of drop-outs has increased at the school level. In addition to the financial reasons, the educational handicap of the parents, the persistent strong influence of traditional values, the low awareness level on the significance of education, the

¹⁶ On a scale of 1-5, 1 being fail and 5 being excellent.

¹⁷ Students that left school or repeated the grade are not included in the calculation.

increased number of REC beneficiaries could also be listed as a reason for the decreased completion rate among primary school students participating in the Program. The number of children covered by direct education support in the centers has increased in comparison to previous years, reducing the time that the REC devotes to the students, i.e. the individual support that each beneficiary of the RECs should enjoy.

It is evident that the REC students show better results when compared to other Roma students, which is a testimony to the fact that the RECs perform well their tasks. However, the average student achievement still cannot go above grade 3, which is expectable having that the project beneficiaries are the low-achievers. Such an achievement rate increases the students' vulnerability in regard to their further education. This weakness will become more pronounced when students enroll into secondary education. Preventive action must be taken. A combination of institutional solutions (REC Centers) with an aggressive intervention in the non-formal sector (in families and local self-governments) through educational and informative campaigns might improve the Program and bring about better results.

Data from this evaluation, as well as from the previous ones, point to the fact that the first two cycles are the most important ones for retaining the children in school and for their future success and progression. *We believe that the Program should in future focus more (if not exclusively) on working with Roma children from grades 1 to 6 (1-3 and 4-6).*

These two cycles are crucial for the further development of the students. The period from the 6th to the 12th year is critical for the psycho-physical development of the child and not only is the personality shaped in this period, but the foundation is created for its ability to learn (reading, writing, mathematical skills, abilities for analysis and synthesis, self-confidence, etc.) and its readiness to face subject-based upper primary education.

Goal 3: To improve the school performance of Roma students aged 15-19

REP in secondary education rests on three pillars: a) scholarships, b) mentorship and c) educational support. This positioning enabled complete successiveness to the REP implemented in primary education and represents a logical continuation to the activities commencing in preschool and primary education. The goal of the REP in secondary education is to help Roma students progress more successfully in secondary education and acquire the necessary competences for continuation of their education and/or active involvement in the labor market.

One of the stronger factors that have a detrimental influence on the educational participation of Roma - poverty - has been lessened through the introduction of the student scholarship component. It was expected that thanks to the scholarships, the families would be able to afford the necessary expenses for the education of their children (books, learning aids, transportation, clothing and food), which in the majority of cases represent a great burden for the modest family budget among most of the Roma families. Before 2008/09, secondary education was not compulsory, making it a burden on the budget of the family and thus decreasing the chances of the primary school graduates to continue into secondary education. This was the reason for a significant number of students not to continue their education.

The poor participation in preschool education and the low achievements in primary education imply poor start-up competences and learning habits of the Roma students in secondary education and represent a strong factor that the Program had to take into account. With the introduction of the mentorship system and involvement of a greater number of teachers (mentors), the Program established not only a high level of compensation for the poor start-up knowledge but also a strong component for education, motivation and control of the achievements of Roma students.

The mentorship assisted the Roma students in overcoming or at least alleviating deficiencies from the previous level(s) of education. The Program ensured that each student was provided with individual academic support and help in developing his/her learning skills, addressing school-related and personal problems, and also facilitated student integration into the academic and social life of the school. The mentors supported the students in their subject learning, academic planning and active learning, and prepared them for the A-Level examinations/Matura (in the year 2007/8).

One of the most difficult challenges the Program faced was changing of the way of thinking among both students and teachers (mentors). Analyses showed that additional efforts were needed to put permanent “pressure” on students in the form of academic support. The organization of training events and summer and winter courses of the students and the mentors proved successful for the achievement of this objective. The Roma scholarship recipients were given opportunity to participate in a range of activities such as summer camps organized around different themes (debate, street law, film, literature, environmental protection, human rights, learning strategies, communication skills, English language and computer skills, etc.).

For the needs of the Program, a significant number of training events were organized for the mentors in order to improve their competences in the following areas: mentoring, learning processes, socialization processes, communication skills, school didactics, conflict resolution, team work, etc. At the same time, the mentors had the opportunity to educate themselves and get familiar with the Roma culture and the specificities of the Roma population. This component represents one of the pivotal pillars of the Program. Guided by the understanding that “in order to help someone, you need to get to know him/her”, the organizer managed to establish an close ties not only between the mentors and Roma students, but also between the mentors and

the Roma community in general. This was an important achievement which enabled action within the Roma families and animation of the parents to give a greater contribution in the education of their children. All analyses confirm that the family is a strong factor of influence, which, depending on the engagement of the parents, can have a positive or an adverse impact on the achievements of the students. Among the Roma, given the low educational level of the parents, the prevailing traditional values (especially the low importance attributed to education), the low level of self-esteem and the poverty, the active involvement of the parents is decisive.

The focus of the Program revolved around two key indicators that were the basis for the monitoring and evaluation of Program implementation: success/achievements and regular attendance of students. Additional indicators taken into account were: the work of the mentors, parent participation, non-mentor teacher opinions and the efficiency of the training and of the camps.

The secondary school component of the FOSIM Roma Education Program represents a first attempt for an organized approach to the improvement of the achievements of the Roma students in secondary education in the Republic of Macedonia.

FOSIM was aware that success of the Program was crucial in order to attract the attention of the state for undertaking specific steps in this area. Only strident achievements, accompanied by constant bringing to the forefront of the situation can bring about “significant stirring” and undertaking of systemic interventions in this respect.

Coverage in previous years

In the period from 2004 to 2008, the REP supported one single cohort of secondary school students. These students were fully covered with the Program in the period from the moment they started their secondary education to the moment they graduated.

2004/05

262 Roma students (152 male and 110 female) started in 1st year in secondary schools with scholarship and mentorship assistance from the REP. The Program included 235 students from regular secondary schools and 27 students from schools for students with special needs. From them, 220 students from regular sec. schools and 27 students from secondary schools for students with special needs successfully completed the school year. All 220 students from the regular secondary schools enrolled into the second year in September 2005.

2005/06

Of the 220 Roma students who started their second year, 212 successfully completed it and all of them, 212, continued into third year in September 2006.

2006/07

- Of the 212 Roma students who started their third year education, 197 managed to complete it. Of them, 65 students (50 male and 15 female) successfully completed the three-year vocational schools and obtained diplomas for completed 3-year secondary education. Of these 65 students, 18 transferred into 4-year secondary education and obtained in the 2007/08 school year diplomas for completed 4-year secondary education.
- The other 132 students successfully completed the third year from the 4-year secondary school program.

2007/08

- 155 students (81 male and 74 female) started 4-year general or vocational education.
- 148 students (75 male and 73 female) successfully completed the 4-year secondary education.

At the end of the fourth year of program implementation (2007/08), thanks to the REP support, a total of 200 of the initial 262 students - scholarship recipients (76.33% of the initial cohort) completed their secondary education (153 completed the 4-year secondary and 47 students the 3-year secondary education).

In 2008/09 school year, 102 new secondary students were covered by the program.

After having completed in June 2008 a four year cycle of providing scholarships to a whole cohort of secondary school students, FOSIM included in the REP Project in the 2008/09 school year 102 new (44 male and 58 female) Roma secondary school students from third year general and four-year vocational education with an average achievement grade of 3.0 (or up), calculated as an average of the grades from the previous two years. The students were given the opportunity to benefit from a scholarship and mentor assistance by 53 secondary school teachers (15 male and 38 female). These 102 secondary school students come from 40 secondary schools in 21 towns throughout the country. They had not received any assistance in the previous two years from the REP (i.e. in years 1 and 2 of their secondary education) and were now included for the first time in the program.

The distribution of students depending on the type of the secondary school they attended and on gender is presented in Table 2.1.

| Tab. 2.1: School year 2008/09 – Students attending regular schools | No. of schools | No. of students | male | female |
|---|----------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Secondary general | 3 | 7 | 2 | 5 |
| Combined general and vocational | 13 | 42 | 9 | 33 |
| 4-year secondary vocational | 24 | 53 | 33 | 20 |
| Total | 40 | 102 | 44 | 58 |

FOSIM decided to focus on third year students in four-year secondary education for the following reasons:

- (1) With the introduction of compulsory secondary school the MoES decided to award scholarships to all Roma secondary school students but only to those attending first year of school, thus leaving the Roma secondary school students from the other years without any financial support.
- (2) The decision was also a result of the limited budget of the program and its duration which was limited to two more years. This approach ensured that the selected students would receive program support until the completion of their secondary education.
- (3) The REP included in the 2008/09 school year only secondary school students from general and four-year vocational education. The intention was to enable them through the REP to improve their competences and achieve better results thus increasing their chances for continuation of their education at a university level.
- (4) The preparation for the taking of the state Matura examination was pivotal in the decision. To this end, the mentor assistance among the majority of the scholarship recipients was oriented towards better preparation in those subjects that were especially important for passing the state Matura.

That the decision and selection of the candidates was sound is verified by the fact that of a total of 101 out of 102 scholarship students (or 99.02%) successfully completed the year. Only one student discontinued his education.

Previous Evaluations

In 2005, a periodical evaluation showed that the intervention cohort of Roma secondary school students has achieved much better results than the non-intervention cohorts of Roma students enrolled in the first year of secondary education in previous (base-line) years.

The school-based mentorship work has the most significant influence for the improved student achievements, and less significant influence for the regular school attendance of students.

Although the attendance rate is within the expected and very close to that of the students of other ethnic groups (primarily the Macedonian ones), it remains one of the issues that REP should deal with in the upcoming project years.

The mentoring system turned out to be very successful, not only in regard to the improvement of the performances of the secondary school students, but also in the improvement of the school climate, strengthening of the collaboration not only within the mentor team, but also with the other teachers as well.

In 2006, the second periodical evaluation of the REP secondary school component was carried out. The REP is achieving great success in secondary education. The influence of the Program is strongest in the area of improving the achievements of the REP students whereas there are still problems with the improvement of the regular attendance.

The REP program is exerting great influence not only on the students, but also puts the REP teachers and the other teachers in a new position. The realization of the Program in the majority of cases has a stimulative influence on the collaboration among teachers and the cooperation between the teachers and the students. The effects on the animation of parents and their involvement in the Program are somewhat weaker. Given the problems pointed out so far that parents face in everyday life, it is to be expected that this problem becomes an additional challenge for the organizers of the REP and its direct implementers.

The mentorship system should be maintained and strengthened by the FOSIM. For this purpose it is necessary to:

- conduct a analysis of the mentors' needs for additional training;
- organize additional mentor training based on needs assessment of their training needs
- organize more frequent additional REP student training in subjects where they have poor achievements;
- focus the training for the REP students in IT and foreign languages to only those students who have a need for such training;
- organize more frequent mentor meetings where positive and successful examples from the practice are presented,
- design models for enhanced communication between mentors and parents,
- review the possibility for increasing the remuneration for the mentors, especially since some of them point out that they use their own resources for the realization of some of their activities.

In 2007 the third evaluation of the REP secondary school component was conducted. The Roma Education Program continues its successful implementation in secondary education. The influence of the Program is strongest in the area of improving the achievements of the REP students whereas there are still problems with the improvement of the regular attendance.

The REP program proved its power not only on the students, but also put both the REP teachers and the other teachers in a new position. The realization of the Program has a stimulating influence on the collaboration between the teachers, the teachers and parents between the teachers and the students. Some of the pinpointed problems, such as: the state Matura examination, early marriages, disinterest by some of the parents, etc. will be an additional challenge for those responsible for the REP program as well as for the immediate implementers.

In 2008, the fourth evaluation of the REP secondary school component was conducted. The REP Program in secondary education managed to achieve the planned goals, and despite the large number of initial problems and the exceptionally specific target population, i.e. beneficiaries, the Program showed strength, adaptability and quality which resulted in a remarkable success and achievements by the secondary school students.

This success story attracted the attention not only of the state institutions, but also gave a valuable contribution to the enhancement of the educational level of the Roma population. The results from the implementation of the Program will be even more impressive in time, as interventions in education do not yield short-term results; on the contrary, they will be visible once these students complete higher education and/or find employment and return this investment for the good of the entire Roma community and the country in general.

The evaluation in 2009 was conducted with the assistance of OSI Macedonia. For the purposes of the evaluation of the REP secondary school component, a research was carried out among 102 USAID scholarship recipients (44 male and 58 female).

The evaluation consisted of two basic components:

- 1) review and analysis of the school documentation and periodical reports of students in order to record the actual situation of the secondary students – scholarship recipients at the REP secondary schools in the Republic of Macedonia in 2008/09.
- 2) conducting of an empirical research aimed at ascertaining the opinions and attitudes of the REP scholarship recipients in the academic year 2008/09 on their own progress and on the implementation of the Program.

The research covered a sample of 102 scholarship recipients. It was conducted through:

- **Documentation analysis:** 102 scholarship recipients.
- **Periodically Reports:** 102 REP Roma students from the 40 REP secondary schools in the Republic of Macedonia for the periods of 2008/09.
- **Questionnaires:** 95 REP scholarship recipients and 37 mentors (9 male and 28 female).
- **Focus groups:** 98 REP students who have completed their education and were included in the program.

The periodical evaluation was carried out in from June to October 2009 by the Research Team.

The analysis of the results obtained will be presented in the context of the third main goal (Goal 3) of the Roma Education Program and functionally related to it.

Retention

Table 3.1 enables us to see that the secondary school students - recipients of scholarships in 2008/09 school year achieve a progression rate of 99.02%.

Tab. 3.1: Retention rate of secondary school regular students - recipients of scholarships

| 2005 | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|--------------|-------|--------|--------------|--------|-------|---------------|-------|-------|
| ENROLLED | | | DROP-OUTS | | | REPEATERS | | | GRADUATES | | |
| Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F |
| 235 | 133 | 102 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 220 | 123 | 97 |
| 100.00 | 56.60 | 43.40 | 100.00 | 62.50 | 37.50 | 100.00 | 71.43 | 28.57 | 100.00 | 55.90 | 44.10 |
| 100.00% | | | 3.42% | | | 2.97% | | | 93.61% | | |
| 2006 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F |
| 220 | 119 | 101 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 212 | 114 | 98 |
| 100.00 | 54.9 | 45.91 | 100.00 | 50.00 | 50.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 53.77 | 46.23 |
| 100.00% | | | 2.74% | | | 0.90% | | | 96.36% | | |
| 2007 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F |
| 212 | 119 | 93 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 197 | 112 | 85 |
| 100.00 | 56.13 | 43.87 | 100.00 | 14.29 | 85.71 | 100.00 | 66.67 | 33.33 | 100.00 | 56.85 | 43.15 |
| 100.00% | | | 3.30% | | | 1.41% | | | 92.92% | | |
| 2008 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F |
| 155 | 81 | 74 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 148 | 75 | 73 |
| 100.00 | 52,26 | 47,74 | 100,00 | 80,00 | 20,00 | 100,00 | 0 | 0 | 100,00 | 50,67 | 49,33 |
| 100,00 | | | 3,22 | | | 1,29 | | | 95,48 | | |
| 2009 – NEW STUDENTS | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F |
| 102 | 44 | 58 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 101 | 44 | 57 |
| 100,00 | 43,14 | 56,86 | 100,00 | 0 | 100,00 | 100,00 | 0 | 0 | 100,00 | 43,56 | 56,44 |
| 100,00 | | | 0,98 | | | 0,00 | | | 99,02 | | |

The previous years' evaluations indicated a downward trend of the drop-out rate of the Roma students which averaged 3.17% and approximated the overall secondary education drop-out rate in the country (2.84%)¹⁸. This year's evaluation points out to a striking dive in the drop-out rate to only 0.98% which is way below the national average. Although this is a new generation/cohort of secondary school students who were selected according to their achievements in the previous years, a comparison is still possible, because the average achievement rate of the previous cohort was similar to the average achievement rate of this particular cohort of students. The achievement of such a low drop-out rate is a success and there is no doubt that the program has made in this respect significant achievements. This success of the Roma students merits further analysis and detection of the key factors that made it happen.

- 1) The first reason can be found in the decision of the Government to declare secondary education compulsory. This in itself means that the young people are obligated to attend this educational tier. If somebody fails to enroll or drops out, he/she risks being penalized, this being clearly stated in the legal provisions. According to the Secondary Education Act, "A fine in the amount of EUR 1,000 in denar counter value will be pronounced against the parent, i.e. guardian, of the minor student if he is not enrolled in secondary school or fails to

¹⁸ National Program for the Development of Education 2005-2015, MoES, 2005

attend it regularly.” (Article 3)¹⁹. This is a very clear provision. However, such penal provisions were also foreseen in the previously defined compulsory education, but failed to help students enroll into and remain in school. Hence, this legal provision cannot be regarded as a strong factor which contributed to the drastic decrease of the drop-out rate among the Roma students;

- 2) The second reason can be sought in the introduction of the external assessment by the Government. This appraisal was planned to happen at the end of the 2008/09 school year, but triggered huge reactions among the professional community and the general public in the country. The reason for this was the decision of the Ministry to assess the work of the teachers through the external assessment of students. It was announced that all teacher will be penalized if the external assessment displayed a significant discrepancy between the grade received at the external assessment and the grade previously established by the teacher. The Government and the MoES gave as a reason for this the unsubstantiated allegation that students in primary and secondary education were “bestowed” grades.²⁰ The respective decision caused the teachers to make the assessment criteria strict, because nobody welcomes the chance that his/her grade is higher than the one the student will receive at the external assessment. Hence, not only were no undeserved grades awarded in the course of last year, but to a large extent the teachers applied much harsher assessment criteria. This is testified to by the students and the mentor teachers, more that 50% of whom stated that the assessment criteria were much stricter in the course of this year that before;
- 3) The third reason can be sought in the fact that only third year students were selected. If we keep in mind that the highest drop-out rate is present among first and second year Roma students, one could argue that once students reach third year, they are likely to complete their schooling. Maybe there is truth in this claim, but we must not forget that although with a smaller intensity, drop-out continues also into the upper grades of secondary education, and so does re-sitting the year. In our case, with the exception of one female student, not only is there no re-sitting, but all students managed to complete the year with success and in the prescribed time. This means that this possible reason also is not strong enough to be a decisive factor;
- 4) A fourth reason could be the selection of students by FOSIM and the criteria for awarding the scholarship, i.e. every student applying for a scholarship must have an average grade of at least „3”²¹ and must not allow the grade to drop in the course of the schooling as thus he/she would forfeit the scholarship. This is a serious reason. All the evaluations so far pointed to the fact that the scholarship is for the majority of students of decisive importance and their motivation to keep it strongly impacts their high learning motivations and their resolve to complete the year with success;
- 5) The fifth reason is in line with the program and its objectives to, in addition to the scholarship, provide other support to the students (mentoring and academic training). This is undoubtedly a strong factor which the previous evaluations highlighted as well. The results from the focus group held with already graduated REP students indicated a high level of appreciation on the part of the students to USAID and FOSIM not only for the scholarship but above all for the fact that they had developed a range of competences they had previously

¹⁹ Amendments and Supplements to the Secondary Education Act, 2007

²⁰ External assessment was not applied in the course of this school year, due to the fact that the Constitutional Court quashed part of the articles in the act which regulated the assessment of students and teachers, thus returning the entire policy for further elaboration. It can be presumed that in the course of the 2009/10 school year, we will see the implementation of the external assessment of student achievements.

²¹ On a scale of 1 - *fail* to 5 - *excellent*

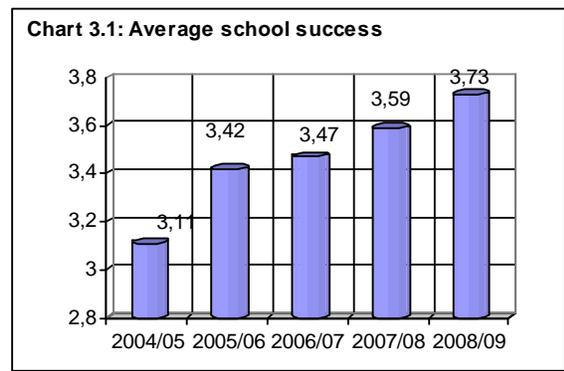
not believed possible to have (self-confidence, abilities to learn, broader vision and desire for career advancement, IT abilities, foreign language, etc.);

- 6) A sixth reason can be found in the fact that the public opinion inside the Roma community is dynamically changing for the better. The significance of education is becoming deeply rooted in the minds of the Roma in the country.

It is evident that the high percentage of progression among the Roma students is a result of the effect of several combined factors of which undoubtedly the most significant is the impact of the Program. It is a well known fact that results in education cannot be immediately visible, and this case only goes to prove this maxim. What at the beginning seemed difficult, and in most cases impossible, is now proving justified.

Learning achievements:

The positive trend of decrease in the drop-out and repetition rates among the REP students is followed by improvement of the learning achievements. Chart 3.1 reveals that Roma students have been improving their achievement/success rate with each subsequent year. If the average success rate in 2005 was 3.11, it improved to close to the grade 4 in 2009, which is an immense achievement. Improvement of the average achievement/success rate clearly indicates



that the results of the REP program are improving permanently. Although we are talking about two distinct student cohorts, a comparison is possible because it points out to a regularity which is of exceptional significance not only for the Roma students, but for all secondary school students. The most problematic years for a successful completion of secondary education are the initial ones. This is the time when the poorer achievers drop out or repeat the year, thus leaving in the upper years the better achievers of whom it can be logically expected to achieve better results in their learning. The turning point is the transition from the first into the second year. The comparison is possible because the cohorts of 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08 had an average achievement rate approximate to the criteria for the selection of the candidates from the 2008/09 school year, which was a minimum average grade of 3.

In regard to the learning success achieved by the students - scholarship recipients, a conclusion can be drawn that there is an equal distribution of students according to the marks at the end of the school year and the gender, with a slight domination of the female students in the category Very good.

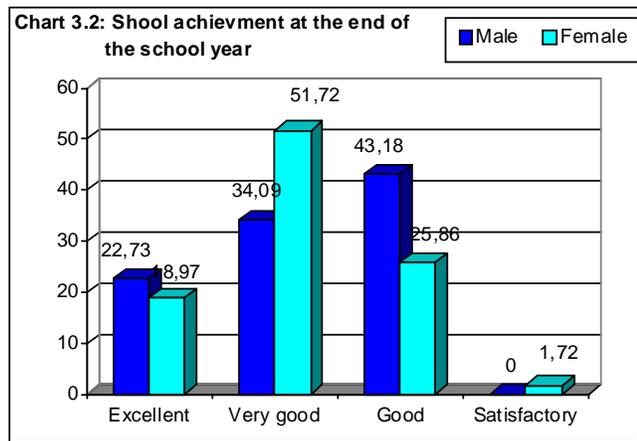
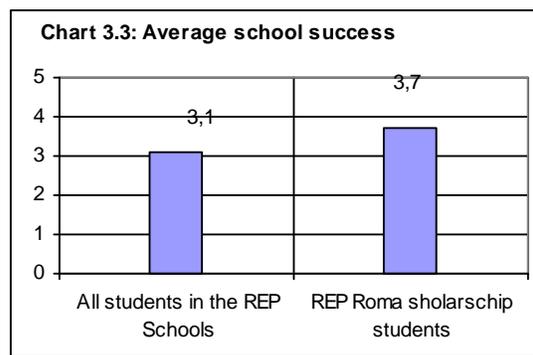


Chart 3.2 demonstrates that students of both genders are concentrated in the categories *Excellent* and *Very Good*, and together with those from the category

Good create the majority of students. Given previous trends, where the Roma students were

concentrated at the lower end of the marking scale, this data points to a significant achievement in the learning success of the students - scholarship recipients. This trend of improvement speaks by itself that the Program has accomplished its objective in regard to the student achievements.

If we compare the success rate of the students - scholarship recipients with the overall success of all students in the REP schools in year three (3.1), we can see that it is way higher. This information is exceptionally important, because it highlights the competitiveness of the success of the scholarship recipients in comparison to the other Roma and non-Roma students within their schools. (Chart 3.3)



The trend of improved achievement/success of the Roma students was evident in the previous evaluations, although they were always below or close to the school average. In this case they are above the average, which from the perspective of their competitiveness for continuation of their education is highly significant.

The data analysis points to several factors that impacted the improvement of the achievements of the REP students - scholarship recipients. Without doubt, the single most significant factor was the involvement of the mentors. This influence is especially emphasized by the students themselves. Of the available choice responses for the most influential factor on the progress of Roma students, the REP students and REP mentors selected: the influence of the mentors, the scholarship, the academic training and the high motivation. The existence of high motivation among these students is confirmed by the fact that 55.80% respondees stated that they are not entirely satisfied with the success they have achieved and that they could do better. It is interesting to see that this percentage corresponds to the percentage of mentor teachers who believe that the students could have achieved more. It is obvious that capacities exist in the students that could be developed further.

In regard to the changes in the course of the schooling, the REP teachers agreed that the following manifestations have continued: more regular attendance among part of the students, improved learning success/achievements, enhanced self-confidence, greater involvement in the teaching process and greater accountability in the completion of assignments. This speaks by itself of the strong support the Roma students receive from their mentors in the school and the willingness of the other teachers to help. It is more than obvious that the contacts are already established, that the students have adapted themselves to the requirements of the mentors, and also a systemic approach in their work can be seen. The mentorship system, viewed from the perspective of learning achievements is showing good results. This is verified by the statements of the students according to which 91.12% are largely satisfied with their cooperation with the mentors, whereas 61.05% believe or are positive that they would not have achieved what they did if they hadn't had the support of the mentors.

The influence of the mentors does not stop at the control of regular attendance but contributes to the increase of knowledge and skills of the mentored students and enhancement of the communication with the parents of the students.

Searching for the reasons for poorer achievements among a small portion of the students in 2008/09, the mentors stress the influence of two main reasons: 1) more rigorous assessment criteria applied in this school year (close to 80% of the mentor teachers believe that the assessment criteria were more rigorous in the course of this year in comparison to previous

years) and 2) students learn insufficiently. The same reasons were highlighted by the students themselves. It is good that the causes have been identified, which leaves room for addressing them in the course of the next project and school year.

The mentors reveal that the external assessment, which was supposed to be introduced at the end of the evaluation school year planned, impacted their work, and 67.57% of them stated that they spent most of the time preparing the students for the external assessment. It is evident that the external assessment used up a lot of the time of the mentors which could have been put to use for realization of the other tasks envisaged in the mentorship system, such as cooperation with the parents, which although growing in intensity each year, still is weak among part of the student families, and also for other extracurricular activities which were more frequent in the previous years.

Regular attendance

According to official school data, the REP students had at the end of the 2008/09 school year 5948 instances of absence, of which 5210 (51,08 absences per student) are excused absences, whereas 738 (7,23 absences per student) are unexcused. Calculated into school days, this means that an average student had been excusably absent close to 8.7 days, with 1 day without any justification/excuse. In comparison with the absenteeism instances evidenced in previous year (12770), the situation has improved more than twice. This is a remarkable achievement which is atypical and below the average absenteeism rate for the country. However, this is only an average; there is still a huge difference among students –there are those with many absences, as a rule these would be the poorer achievers, and there are those with few absences, as a rule the higher achievers.

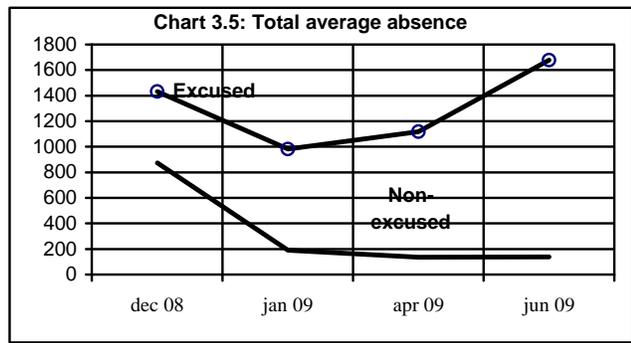
| | Excused absences | | Non-excused absences | |
|------------------|------------------|-------------|----------------------|------------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 01.12.08 | 683 | 750 | 151 | 124 |
| 20.01.09 | 401 | 581 | 104 | 86 |
| 15.04.09 | 446 | 671 | 66 | 69 |
| 10.06.09 | 678 | 1000 | 81 | 57 |
| Sub total | 2208 | 3002 | 402 | 336 |
| Total | 5210 | | 738 | |
| Average | 51,08 | | 7,23 | |
| Average | 58,31 | | | |

This research revealed also that on the question of regular attendance, there are significant problems which are outside of the area of the teachers' influence.

Although the average number of absences has been drastically reduced, the same trend from the previous years as to the period of the year when they have been committed can be recognized.

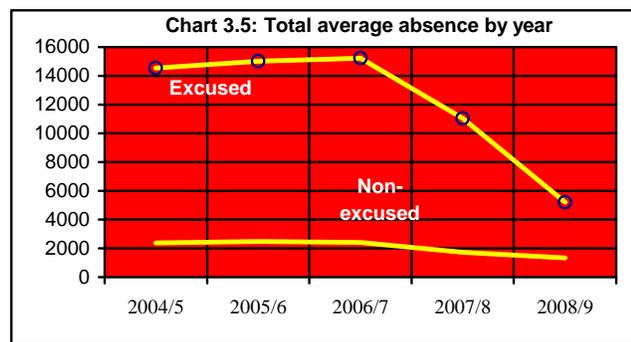
The majority of executed and non-excused absences occur in the first three months of the school year, with a significant number occurring also at the end of the school year. Based on the statements of the mentors, of the teachers (both REP and non-REP), of part of the parents and part of the students in the period from 2005 to 2008, it can be concluded that there are very strong factors that impact regular attendance, and that for the time being they are immune to the REP interventions.

Most significant reasons for the absences were the following ones: *poor financial situation of the family, the weak immunological situation of the Roma students* (frequent illnesses confirmed by a high number of excused absences), *seasonal work of students* (most pronounced in the winter and the spring period).



The first two reasons prevail in the winter period and primarily in the bigger towns whereas the third reason dominates in late spring. A confirmation of this statement can be found in the distribution of the absences according to the time when they were made, see Tab. 3.3 and Chart 3.5. It is evident that the biggest number of absences was made in the autumn and, above all, winter period, decreasing in the spring period and increasing in late spring. This distribution of the absences speaks in favor of the already detected problem, which not only the REP students face, but also the other Roma students, and which impacts regular school attendance.

In the researches of 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and similarly in the current one, the mentor teachers and the other teachers point out to the students' engagement in *seasonal activities* of their families as one of the main reasons for the irregular attendance by the Roma students. Parents are frequently involved in seasonal work to increase their family budget. In such cases, the children either go with the parents and actively contribute, or stay at home under the supervision of the elders or relatives or unsupervised. This remains, same as with the pre-primary and primary school students, one of the strongest reasons for the great number of instances of absence.

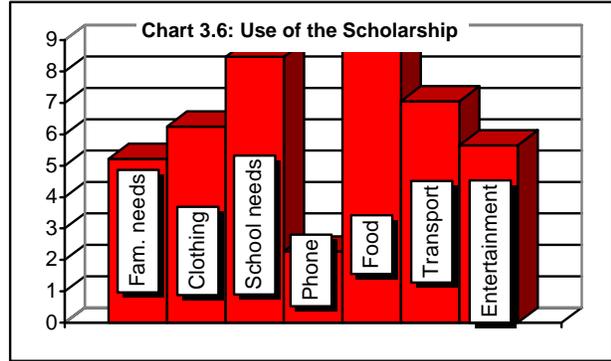


In regard to the gender distribution of absences, it is evident that, unlike the female students whose attendance rate (57.55) has improved in comparison with the previous year and is within the expectations, the male students are much more at risk from this problem (72,93).

It is obvious that the financial factor continues to exert huge influence over the student achievements. Although the scholarship is of great help, it cannot solve all financial problems of the families, but only mitigate those related to the specific costs for secondary education.

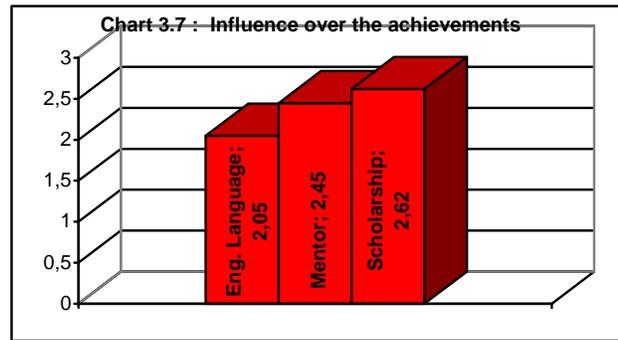
The students and the scholarship

As regards the issue of scholarships, it was concluded that in the past 4 years, it was mostly used for securing food, transportation and school materials (books, notebooks, stationary, etc.) by the students. In addition to proclaiming secondary education compulsory, the Government decided that it should also be free, meaning that the Government committed to providing free transportation and text books, but only for the two junior cohort of secondary education that have enrolled following the declaration of compulsory secondary education. For the other students, secondary education is not free. Thus, for these students the scholarship is a valuable aid in covering



the costs associated with school; that was namely its purpose. However, it was detected that for some students, the scholarship also serves a role in addressing some other family needs, such as clothing and securing transportation to school. If addressing these needs had a positive impact on the students' efforts in school, and this was obviously the case, as the students in question achieved success in their learning, than this redirection of funds, although not in line with its primary purpose, is acceptable from the viewpoint of the program.

The scholarship is a huge help to the Roma students. Although they attribute great significance to the mentorship assistance and to the acquisition of foreign languages, forced to make a choice of the one thing to give up, they are most reluctant to give up the scholarship. Irrespective of the responses, these three factors are of exceptional significance to these students.



The students and the mentors

As regards the mentorship support, the Roma students and the mentors have established a strong interaction which resulted in a high degree of satisfaction with their collaboration among 94.59% of the mentors and among 91.25% of the students. Close to half of the scholarship recipients stated that without the mentor they would not have achieved the results they did at the end of the school year. Only 8.75% of the students expressed certain reserves in regard to the assistance received from the mentors.

Presented with the dilemma what to give up if they had to choose one of the two, 73.81% of the students would still retain the scholarship. This is a difficult dilemma and it was to be expected that the scholarship is the stronger factor and a necessity for the students given the financial situation of the families. Still, the scholarship has more significance that it has influence on the achievement. It is a solution to a range of problems the students face, which are directly or indirectly linked to their education. It is encouraging, however to read that 26.19% of the students, despite of having to make a choice would not give up anything. They are, simply,

aware that these two components are inseparable. This is evidence that this component of the program has been successfully implemented.

The former Program scholarship recipients

With the aim of finding out what is the situation with the REP secondary school alumni one year after their completion of secondary education as assisted with the Program – information were collected from the students on the following issues: whether they have enrolled into university studies, whether they are employed or unemployed, what are they active in, whether and how much the Program has helped them from today's viewpoint, etc, as part of the evaluation three focus groups were held on the Drim hotel in Struga on 1st and 2nd October 2009. A total of 98 secondary school graduates, former scholarship recipients of the Program participated in three separate focus groups, each of them with duration of one and a half hours.

Focus groups findings:

The discussion with the graduate Roma students - scholarship recipients of the program revealed that the individuals in question were mature persons who knew full well what they want of life. The groups comprised current university students, employed and unemployed.

The 2008 evaluation presented that 60.84% of the graduate secondary school students - scholarship recipients wished to continue their education at one of the universities in the country. The remaining ones who would not continue their education saw their future in employment; the majority of the latter were students with poorer achievements and students from families with severe financial difficulties. Part of them (17.86%), although wishing to enroll into higher education, stated clearly that they had to seek employment in order to contribute to the family budget. The discussion in the focus group confirmed these expectations.

Unfortunately, not everybody wishing to continue his/her education was able to enroll into university, nor did those wanting to find a job get employed. This is understandable as only 51 of the participants in the focus groups were university students (which represents 33% of the Roma secondary school graduates²² who passed the state Matura or 67 % of the total number of Roma students enrolled in first year of university studies in the academic year 2007/08; 14 participants have full-time long-term employment (7% of the graduates), while additional 19 (or 9.5% of the graduates) are employed part-time in the NGO sector. It is interesting to mention that all of those who are employed occupy positions that have nothing to with the vocations that completed in secondary education. Only one person found employment in his area of training.

The long discussion with these young people generated the following impressions:

- These are young people who seemed mature for their actual age. They can well detect the reasons for their success or failure and learn from it.
- The students who managed to enroll are different in their approach to questions of life in comparison to the others. They see their future in advancement in their careers, securing a decent existence for themselves and their future family. The position their own education in relation to the need to help the other Roma and to strengthen the Roma community.

They do not regard themselves discriminated and see the way out of the poor situation, not only for themselves and for others, see in their education and proving to themselves and the

²² The percentages in this paragraph refer to graduates who had participated in the Program and who completed their secondary education in 2008.

other that they can, that they are able to and that they want to become somebody and to make a contribution. They are aware of the difficult situation in which the country is in and are thus even more persistent in completing their education as well as they can. They are characterized by high self-confidence, ambition and initiative.

- The employed former scholarship recipients, although they wanted to continue their education, but still the poor financial situation of their families they had to work to contribute to the enlarging the family budget. The manner of their employment is most often diverse and is mostly achieved through personal acquaintances.
- The unemployed former scholarship recipients are aware of the situation they are in. Part of them does not give up and through other forms of education and training are trying to improve their competences to succeed in finding employment. It is characteristic for all that they are aware that through educational advancement they have better chances of finding jobs. They are aware of all the anomalies in the employment processes, such as partisan influence, nepotism and unlawful employment channels.
- In respect to the REP, there is full consensus that the Program is the best thing that happened to the Roma students in the process of their schooling. The majority stress the good cooperation with the mentors and express their immense gratitude for the Program which enabled them not only a scholarship but also gaining of a significant amount of skills and knowledge that they can depend on now, regardless of their current status.
- In responding to the question of what they would change in the Program, they are all of the opinion that it should remain as it is and that it should aim at increasing the coverage to as many Roma students as possible.
- The most significant was the recommendations coming from the participants in the focus groups that the Program should pay more attention to the development of soft skills among the new generations of students to be covered by it. Soft-skills development was emphasized as one their greatest gains that helped the immensely not only to complete their education but also to improve the quality of their life, work and future education.

Conclusion

The periodical evaluation of the Program identified results which speak of a significant progress in comparison with previous years. It managed fully to achieve the envisaged goals and objectives and represents a continuation of a success story in secondary education. Despite the large number of initial problems experienced in the previous years, the Program demonstrated strength, adaptability and high quality all of which resulted in a success of the students in secondary education.

The mentorship system matured and established itself as strong, well-developed system which brings in new quality each year. It grows on the experiences that the mentors accumulated in the previous years, addresses in time emerging issues preventing them from becoming problems, it has developed mechanisms for overcoming the current weaknesses and has established itself as a constituent element in the work of the REP schools. The only remark regards the cooperation with the parents. The job description of every teacher in primary and secondary education contains the obligation of communication and cooperation with the parents of the students. Unfortunately, this element is one of the weakest links in our education system. In the case of Roma students, the cooperation between the teachers and the parents if of exceptional

significance and should receive greater attention. Although this obligation of the mentor teachers has not been precisely specified as an obligation within the Program itself, the conclusion still remains the cooperation with parents should be especially addressed.

The scholarship is a strong motivating factor which positively impacts the improvement of the achievements and regular attendance. Its linking to and conditionality on the achieved success was a good decision and needs to be maintained. That requires quality monitoring which can detect emerging issues and prevent possible wrong decisions in cases when instead of subjective objective impediments and factors appear which decrease the achievement and regular attendance of the students.

The five years of experience and the results achieved in the implementation of the secondary school component of the REP point to the fact that the REP possesses all the elements of a good practice in working with Roma secondary school students and has the potential to be taken up by the state. The acknowledgement and taking over of the positive experiences and their incorporation in the measures/projects financed by the Government/MoES ensures the sustainability of the current interventions. The decision of the Government to provide scholarships to secondary school students needs to become a regular practice which will be enhanced with the two other program components (the mentorship and the academic assistance). Such a synergy will provide for better efficiency to this government measure.

This evaluation showed that the results from the implementation of the Program will increase with time because interventions in education do not produce short-term effects. On the contrary, it is to be expected that each year will produce better results.

Goal 4: To promote equal opportunities and increase the academic achievements of Roma students at State Universities

The Roma Student Support Program was designed so as to facilitate diverse kinds of support. Thus, in addition to the scholarship and support by “Romaversitas” (trainings, educational-informational courses, information, logistics, the students were also involved in a mentorship system which meant selection of mentors (university professors and teaching assistants) who helped them in their learning and the progress in their studies. However, the Evaluation showed that despite the good functioning of the mentorship system, certain problems appeared that adversely affected the successful advancement of the Roma students. This primarily refers to the weak motivation among part of the mentors (primarily the professors) and their lack of free time, both of which directly affected the frequency of the meetings with the students and hence the quality of the progress. It turned out that the mentors were most successful in the preparation of Roma students for the subject/subjects they realize in the study Programs that they are involved in. Similarly, the research showed that it could have been possible for the mentors to influence other professors to the benefit of the students - scholarship recipients, which is not in accordance with the basic principles of the Program.

It is because of this, and in line with the Program for constant improvement, that in the academic year 2006/07, the mentorship system was replaced with a tutorship system, with tutorials being offered throughout the academic year. The PTS provided voucher credits to be used by any Roma student; one student could use a maximum of 50 voucher credits in the course of the year (1 voucher credit equaling 60 minutes). Students defined the specific topics, primarily relating to the mandatory subjects, which they worked on with the tutor or tutors (the latter in case there were more subjects and/or topics for which the student needed support). The students were required to draft a plan of activities which was submitted to Romaversitas. The tutor(s) were identified by the student or by Romaversitas (in case the student was unable to identify the tutor relevant to the topic /specific knowledge needed). The tutors were selected among the graduates and senior students with outstanding academic achievements, as well among the junior teaching assistants.

The PTS was administered and monitored by the Romaversitas staff. The implementers of the Program were fully convinced that the tutorial system will manage to overcome the problems in the functioning of the mentorship system and that it will improve the speed and quality of the progress of the Roma students included in the tertiary education system.

Coverage

Academic year 2004/05

The student support component started with providing scholarships for 63 Roma students enrolled in the first year of education at the universities in the Republic of Macedonia.

Academic year 2005/06

The Program covered a total of 48 scholarship recipients from different academic years. Of them, 38 students had mentors (a total of 28 mentors were engaged - professors, junior teaching assistants, part-time external assistants and students-peers with an average achievement of over 8.00²³), who supported one or more students, with 2 students attending the same study course at most.

²³ On the scale of 5 to 10, 5 meaning fail and 6-10 representing passing grades, with 10 being the highest.

Of these scholarship recipients, in the course of the academic year 2006/07, 4 students graduated and a further 8 completed the attendance of the required lectures. Only 6 students did not manage to enroll into the next semester on time.

Academic year 2006/07

An analysis was conducted of the achievements of each scholarship recipient individually and also of the overall Program implementation. On the basis of the results, a selection was made resulting in 29 scholarship recipients (15 male and 14 female) of the 36 covered in 2005/06 who did not fall into the group graduating or completing attendance of lectures, being able to continue to receive a scholarship, on the basis of their achievements and fulfillment of the Program criteria.

Of these 29 scholarship recipients, only 9 used tutors in 2006/07 (from April to June/July); for them a total of 12 tutors were engaged - teaching assistants, part-time external assistants and students-peers with a high average achievement.

Academic year 2007/08.

The Program (FOSIM/Romaversitas) entered its third development phase. On the basis of the periodic evaluations and the efforts to increase the number of Roma students who are benefiting from the services of the Foundation and Romaversitas, a new Program design was created. Unlike previous years, when only the students – scholarship recipients received support, the Program brought in a new dimension – academic support of students who are not scholarship recipients of the Program, thus increasing the number of Roma students receiving support from the Program. To this end, in the course of this year, the Program supported two categories of students – 35 students - scholarship recipients and 45 students - non-recipients of scholarships by the Program. In addition to the scholarship awarded to the scholarship recipients by the Program, all students had the opportunity to, depending on their needs and interests, use additional academic support, such as: tutoring, English language, IT, participation in other training events.

Academic year 2008/09.

In the academic year 2008/09, the Program (FOSIM/Romaversitas) entered its fourth phase. Similarly as in the previous year, to categories of students received support:

1. 35 students – scholarship recipients (17 male and 18 female) received scholarships (USAID) and additional academic support. 25 out of 35 students were scholarship recipients also in the previous academic year (2007/08), while the other 10 students were selected in an open call at the begging of the 2008/09 academic year.
2. 47 other Roma students who did not receive USAID scholarships, but has the opportunity to use the additional academic support. Of these 47 students, 18 (8 male and 10 female) benefited from the academic support – tutoring assistance and similarly to the scholarship recipients, they had the opportunity to attend workshops, courses in foreign language and IT skills, to apply for and participate in student initiatives and projects, to e part of the summer school, to write articles for the student newsletter *Roma Index* and also to use books from the library.

Research methodology

For the purposes of the Roma Student Support Program: To promote equal opportunities and increase the academic achievements of Roma students at State Universities, a research was

carried out among 35 USAID scholarship recipients (17male and 18 female) and 47 other Roma students, non- scholarship recipients (27 male and 20 female)

The evaluation consisted of two basic components:

- 3) review and analysis of the Romaversitas documentation (periodical reports and student portfolios) in order to record the actual situation of the students – scholarship recipients at the universities in the Republic of Macedonia for the periods of 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09.
- 4) conducting of an empirical research aimed at ascertaining the opinions and attitudes of the university students on their own progress and on the implementation of the Program.

The research covered a sample of 34 USAID scholarship recipients²⁴ (16 male and 18 female) and 47 Roma students, non-scholarship recipients (27 male and 20 female). It was conducted through:

- **Documentation analysis:** 35 USAID scholarship recipients and 47 other Roma students, non-scholarship recipients.
- **Periodically Rapports:** 35 Roma university students from the universities in the Republic of Macedonia, recipients of scholarships from 2007 to 2008.
- **Questionnaires:** 34 USAID scholarship recipients (16 male and 18 female) and 47 Roma students, non- scholarship recipients (27 male and 20 female).

For the purpose of greater objectivity of the study, all the phases of the empirical research were characterized by a high degree of anonymity and protection of the interviewee data. Objective data was obtained from the universities and anonymous questionnaires were applied. his increased the level of objectivity of the results, which makes this research a realistic presentation of the situation of the Roma students participating in the REP.

The periodical evaluation was carried out in from June to October 2009 by the Research Team.

The analysis of the results obtained will be presented in the context of the fourth main goal (Goal 4) of the Roma Education Program and functionally related to it.

Previous Evaluations:

In 2005, a periodical evaluation was conducted which showed that the REP is being implemented successfully and is yielding excellent results in the tertiary education sector. Simultaneously, part of the results obtained which indicated certain weaknesses and possible adverse processes, especially in respect to the negative influence of external factors such as: poor finances, seasonal work of the parents and students themselves, the educational level of the parents, the insufficient expert support by the parents, etc., as well the remarks on the work of part of the mentors, the needs for additional training of students and mentors, etc. were all used as the basis for the corrections in the REP itself and its implementation process in the course of 2005 – 2006.

In 2006, the second periodical evaluation of the REP university component was carried out. The results showed that this component was realized successfully and a high degree of satisfaction was established among the students with the cooperation with FOSIM/Romaversitas.

²⁴ During the research one student was not available due to a trip abroad.

Students were making progress in respect to their learning, within their abilities. The problems that arose were not strong enough and were not of such a nature to hamper their learning and overall progress; the only remark made regarding their lesson attendance rate and a recommendation was made to aim for improvements in this area.

The mentorship system, although functioning well left room for rethinking a possible improvement. Given that the students who did not have a mentor achieved similar average success rates as the students – scholarship recipients, it was necessary to re-examine whether the mentorship system was necessary and/or, if necessary, how it could be made better. In line with such comments, the mentorship system was abandoned in 2007.

In 2007 the third evaluation of the university component was conducted.

The mentorship system was replaced by a tutorship system; although the former had functioned with success, some problems in its functioning left room for improvement. The tutorship system proved itself a good solution for overcoming the said problems and is expected to be accepted by a larger number of students in the future Program implementation.

The recommendations from the evaluation suggested that the coming period needs to see a continuation of the permanent monitoring of the Program realization. It is important to ensure that weaknesses that appear are detected on time in order for them to be overcome efficiently.

Romaversitas needs to continue its work and to constantly keep in mind the interests and needs of the students, so that it can ensure their timely addressing. It is evident that the activities in the coming period need to be primarily of educational nature, as has been requested by the majority of students (73.68%), as well as in the area of strengthening student competencies for languages, computer skills, writing skills, research skills, presentation skills, verbal skills and employment skills, which is of huge interest to the Roma students.

In 2008, the fourth evaluation of the university component of REP was completed and the following conclusions and recommendations were made.

The evaluation showed a high degree of satisfaction not only on the part of the student's scholarship recipients but also on the part of the other students. The same kind of satisfaction with the cooperation and achievements is present among the employees of the Romaversitas staff.

As regards learning, the students are progressing successfully within their abilities. The emerging problems are insufficiently strong and are not of such a nature that they could hamper the learning and the overall progress of the students.

The tutorship system is functioning well and has shown itself to be a good solution for overcoming the problems that plagued the mentorship system and can be expected to be accepted by the majority of students in the near future.

Attention needs to be paid to the dissatisfaction expressed by the students with the professors and their assessment. This problem merits careful review and monitoring by Romaversitas.

In light of the worsening of the economic situation in the state and the weakening of the financial power of the families, an increase of the amount of the scholarship might be considered. It is easy to foresee how the financial power of the family, the additional work engagement of the

students for the purpose of contributing to the family budget could emerge as strong factors of negative influence in the coming period.

Romaversitas should continue its work, which it currently does well, and constantly take into account the needs and interests of the students so that it is able to respond to them in time. It is evident that future activities should include enhancement of the activities of an educational nature, for which interest was expressed by the majority of students. In the process, additional efforts need to be made to stimulate a greater number of students - scholarship recipients and those who do not receive scholarships to attend the training events and to use the services provided by Romaversitas.

The communication needs to be further strengthened and a data collection system improved for monitoring of and obtaining feedback from students who are not scholarship recipients to use the Romaversitas services. The creation of a global Data-base for Roma students (regardless whether they are scholarship recipients or not) would be a good basis for a comparison and appraisal of the Program.

The evaluation in 2009 was conducted with the assistance of Romaversitas. The research used data received from the data base of Romaversitas and also data collected in the field for the purpose of the research. In order to ensure as high a possible objectivity of the evaluation, all phases of the empirical research were carried out with a high degree of anonymity and interviewee personal data protection. Objective data were obtained from the universities and anonymous questionnaires were also received. This elevated the level of objectivity of the results, which makes this research a realistic presentation of the situation of the Roma students participating in the REP.

EVALUATION 2009

In the academic year 2008/09, the Program covered a total of 82 university students from different academic years (35 USAID scholarship recipients (17 male and 18 female) and 47 other Roma students, non- scholarship recipients (27 male and 20 female).

Table 1

| <i>Tutor assistance</i> | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|---|--|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| RV beneficiaries | Students who received tutoring support | Students who received tutoring on 1 subject | Students who received tutoring on 2 subjects | Students who received tutoring on 3 subjects | Total number of tutoring subjects | Total number of tutors |
| USAID Scholarship recipients | 5 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 9 |
| Non scholarship Students | 18 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 33 | 21 |
| Total | 23 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 42 | 30 |

Of 35 recipients of USAID scholarship, 5 students benefited from tutorial support. For the needs of the students, 9 tutors were engaged for providing assistance in their learning in a total of 9 subjects (1 student could be tutored in 2 subjects at most at one particular time). The tutors were most often junior assistants, demonstrators, valedictorian students in general or in the subject area he would be tutoring in, and graduated students. In total, in the course of the academic year, these students used 164 tutor hours or on average 32.8 hours per student.

Of these scholarship recipients, 3 students graduated and 4 completed the attendance of the required lectures in the course of the academic year 2008/09. All students fulfilled the requirements for the enrolment into the following semester or group of subjects, no student dropped out, while one student was abroad in the period when the research was conducted.

Of 35 recipients of USAID scholarships, 17 students also attended training on various topics: Team work, Leadership, Time management, Critique and criticism, Conflict management, Active citizenship, Advocacy and lobbying, Public speech and debate, English Language and Computer Courses, and used the Internet and the library, whereas four students participated in student initiatives/projects.

The Program covered also 47 other Roma students, non-scholarship recipients who had the opportunity to use additional academic support in the same manner as the students scholarship recipients. 18 students took up this opportunity and benefited from a total of 632 hours of tutor assistance in 33 subjects from 21 tutors, or on average 35.11 tutor hours per student. The tutors were selected according to the same criteria for the previous category of students.

Of the 47 non-scholarship recipients, 38 students also attended training on various topics, whereas 8 students participated in student initiatives/projects.

In the course of the academic year 2008/09, 10 students completed the required lecture attendance with 5 students failing to enroll into the subsequent semester or group of subjects.

Students and universities

Data shows that in the course of the study year 2008/09, of the 35 USAID Scholarship recipients, 22 Roma students enrolled at the “Sts Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje (UKIM), 0 student at the Southeast Europe University in Tetovo (SEEU), 5 students at the “St. Clement of Ohrid” University in Bitola (UKLO), 3 at the State University of Tetovo (DUT) and 5 at the “Goce Delchev” University in Shtip (UGD).(See Tab. 2)

| Table 2 <i>Distribution of USAID scholarship students according to year of study, gender and universities</i> | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 35 USAID scholarship recipients | Male | Female | TOTAL | Natural Science students | Social Science students | |
| I year | 4 | 5 | 9 | / | 9 | |
| II year | 10 | 11 | 21 | 1 | 20 | |
| III year | 3 | 2 | 5 | / | 5 | |
| IV year | / | / | / | / | / | |
| Total | 17 | 18 | 35 | 1 | 34 | |
| UKIM – Skopje | 12 | 10 | 22 | 1 | 21 | |
| UKLO - Bitola | 2 | 3 | 5 | / | 5 | |
| SEEU - Tetovo | / | / | / | / | / | |
| DUT - Tetovo | 1 | 2 | 3 | / | 3 | |
| UGD - Shtip | 2 | 3 | 5 | / | 5 | |

Similarly, the data shows that in the course of the study year 2008/09, of the 47 Roma students - non-scholarship recipients, 35 enrolled at the “Sts Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje (UKIM), 3 at the Southeast Europe University in Tetovo (SEEU), 5 at the “St. Clement of Ohrid” University in Bitola (UKLO), 3 at the State University of Tetovo (DUT) and 1 at the “Goce Delchev” University in Shtip (UGD).(See Tab. 3)

| Table 3 | <i>Distribution of students - non-scholarship-recipients according to year of study, gender and universities</i> | | | | | |
|--|---|-----------|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 47 Roma students, non-scholarship recipients | Male | Female | TOTAL | Natural Science students | Social Science students | |
| I year | 2 | 4 | 6 | / | 6 | |
| II year | 8 | 3 | 11 | 1 | 10 | |
| III year | 8 | 5 | 13 | 3 | 10 | |
| IV year | 8 | 7 | 15 | 2 | 13 | |
| V year | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | / | |
| VI year | / | / | / | / | / | |
| Total | 27 | 20 | 47 | 8 | 39 | |
| UKIM – Skopje | 21 | 14 | 35 | 8 | 27 | |
| UKLO - Bitola | 4 | 1 | 5 | / | 5 | |
| SEEU - Tetovo | / | 3 | 3 | / | 3 | |
| DUT - Tetovo | 1 | 2 | 3 | / | 3 | |
| UGD - Shtip | 1 | / | 1 | / | 1 | |

The distribution according to the year of study indicates that in the academic year 2008/09 there is an even distribution of the students without a pronounced concentration. Given that the Program is in its advanced phases, the number of scholarship recipients in the upper years is increasing. The Program implemented decided to include 10 new students from the first and the second year at the expense of those students who have demonstrated good achievements and are not in need of additional assistance. This decision is justifiable given the general conclusion that all students and especially Roma students, who for the major part have evidently weaker educational start-up positions, are in need of support precisely in the initial years of study.

On the issue of subject areas, the USAID Scholarship recipients were in the course of the academic year 2008/09 included in study programs in the area of natural sciences (1) and social sciences (34). The majority (24) are enrolled at teacher training faculties.

The disaggregation of the other students - non-scholarship recipients is similar; in their case too, there is a tendency for majority enrolment in social sciences.

By analyzing the selection of the faculties and scientific areas, it can be concluded that the Roma students prefer social sciences. This choice is in line with the general trend in the country where socio-political and humanistic sciences dominate as the most attractive study options among the student population. For a while now, the technical, natural and bio-medical sciences are not sufficiently attractive for the secondary school graduates, and the faculties educating such scientific profiles have problems in filling the enrolment quotas, i.e. have small number of students.

This evaluation too, confirms the conclusion presented in 2006/07 and 2007/08, that from the perspective of the general problems the Roma population faces, such a choice has its advantages. The majority of students enroll in study courses which educate teachers. Given that research analyzing Roma issues in the country so far put to the forefront the issues of education and selected the lack of Roma teachers in schools as one of the stronger factors that adversely affect the educational achievements of Roma students, such a choice of the REP students is significant not only in respect of their own future, but benefits the whole Roma population in the state.

Students and Tutors

The personal tutoring scheme (PTS) offered assistance as needed and was open to all Roma university students throughout the academic year. PTS was designed to help the Roma students comprehend the complex academic contents and to provide possibilities for remedying any

problems which could be encountered in the individual lecture courses. In order to be able to respond to the specific students' needs, Romaversitas launched a PTS Voucher System.

According to status as of 24th September 2009, 5 students out of 35 scholarship recipients used tutor support from 9 tutors engaged for a total of 9 academic subjects. All students can use during the academic year a total of 50 tutorship credits for academic subject(s) which they choose according to their need. Tutors are young assistants, demonstrators, students with good academic track record and graduate students. Students - scholarship-recipients had the opportunity to attend English language courses, participate in workshops (Team work, Leadership, Time management, Critique and criticism and Conflict management) and the Summer school (Active citizenship, Public representation and lobbying and Introduction to debate), to write for the *Roma Index* student magazine and to be part of student project and initiative teams.

The other students²⁵, who did not receive USAID scholarships, used the opportunity to benefit from tutor assistance. Of the total of 47 students, 18 made use of assistance by tutors. To this end, 21 tutors were hired to provide coaching in a total of 33 subjects. These 18 students attended a total of 644 tutor hours in the course of the academic year. The same preconditions for receiving assistance from tutors were applied for these students too as well as for the students - scholarship recipients. Each of these students had the opportunity to use a total of 50 tutor hours in the course of the entire academic year. The tutors hired were junior assistants, demonstrators, valedictorian students and graduated students.

It is obvious that the tutorship system is well set up and yields results, and hence confirms the decision for it to replace the mentorship system which was applied until the academic year 2006/07. It is no surprise at all that only 5 students of the scholarship recipients used tutor assistance in this academic year. The majority of these students had the opportunity to use tutors in the course of their studying in the last two years and, as the previous periodic evaluations showed, expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the tutorship system and indicated that it had helped them greatly to overcome the initial difficulties. The majority of students (65.22%) who did not use the help of a tutor stated as reason for that the fact that they had not been in need of tutor assistance. It is evident that only the poorer achievers and those most in need of additional help use the assistance of tutors in their studying. This only goes to confirm the justifiability of the replacement of the mentorship system which had certain weaknesses and often formalized the implementation.

The mentorship system started off from the assumption that each student needs assistance and support in the course of the studying. This assumption was incorrect in the case of more successful students and most frequently ended in a formalization of this system. In addition, the motivation of the mentors, who for the most part were university professors, were quite low leading to irregular performance, poor effects and in some cases a high level of dissatisfaction on the part of those students who really needed the assistance. On the other hand, some students have unrealistic expectations from their cooperation with the professors in respect to their obligations, not only for the programs (subjects) of the professors-mentors but especially in the programs of the other subjects. All these shortcomings were overcome with the introduction of the tutorship system. In this system assistance was provided only to those students who really needed it; the choice was made by the student him/herself, which from the perspective of his/her motivation was a moment of significance.

²⁵ Of these students 25, or 53.19%, receive scholarships from another source.

Evidence of this are the students - non-scholarship recipients who opted for the use of tutor assistance. If we look at the ratio of these students and the students who did not use tutor assistance, we will see that the majority of students using tutor assistance are those who had failed to enroll into the following semester/group of subjects, i.e. the weaker students, who are in obvious need of additional help, and also students who had completed attendance at lectures and are about to pass the final exam or are in the process of preparing the graduation paper.

The best confirmation for the successfulness of the tutorship system are the very statements by the students, who without exception indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the cooperation with the tutors and with the assistance they provided and rate the satisfaction with an average grade of 9, on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being highest). Most often, the focus of the tutor assistance is placed on the preparedness of the students for passing the exam in a specific subject (successfulness graded with 9) and planning the studying time (successfulness graded with 8.83). Most frequent location of meetings between students and their tutors was the faculty and rarer the tutor's home.

Similar responses in regard to the tutor assistance were obtained from the students - non-recipients of scholarships. There too, a high degree of satisfaction with the work of the tutors is evident. A dominant reason for not opting for the use of tutors by the other students is the reason – *I had no need of a tutor*. It is obvious that lack of information had also influenced this decision of theirs, because a part of them did not use a tutor also because they did not believe that tutors could help them and displayed a certain degree of reservation towards the use of tutor assistance.

The responses of the scholarship recipients and non-scholarship recipients who used tutor assistance give the best picture of the work of the tutors. Without exception, all the qualities which a tutor should possess were highly rated by the students. Thus, the categories: motivates me to learn, taught me how to learn, prepares me for an exam, helped me achieve better results and progress in my studying, sets aside more time for me, was motivated to work with me, respects my opinion, I felt good in working with him/her, the meetings were held following the previously agreed plan, the results from the cooperation were better, makes me be more persistent in my learning and work more, offers me assistance in the subject where I needed it, followed the progress of studying, and the use of the time was more rational, on the scale of agreement starting from 1 – *I do not agree* to 4 – *I fully agree*, show an average agreement status of 3.76, which represents a high degree of concurrence.

On the basis of the data received, we can conclude that the tutorship system has managed to successfully substitute the mentorship system. A confirmation for this conclusion can be found in the statements of the students who have been receiving tutoring. In the selection of the strongest factor of influence over their progress, the students placed the assistance provided by the tutors at the same level with the scholarship and the activities of Romaversitas, whereas those students - non-scholarship recipients who used the opportunity for tutor assistance highlight this assistance as the strongest factor for their progress.

Academic support

In addition to the tutor assistance, the students - scholarship recipients and the students - non-recipients of scholarships benefited also from additional academic support for strengthening their competences.

In the course of 2008/09, FOSIM/Romaversitas implemented a full and diverse Program focused on the Roma students with the aim of improving their academic competencies and stimulating their motivation for learning. The program offered to the students consists of different types of

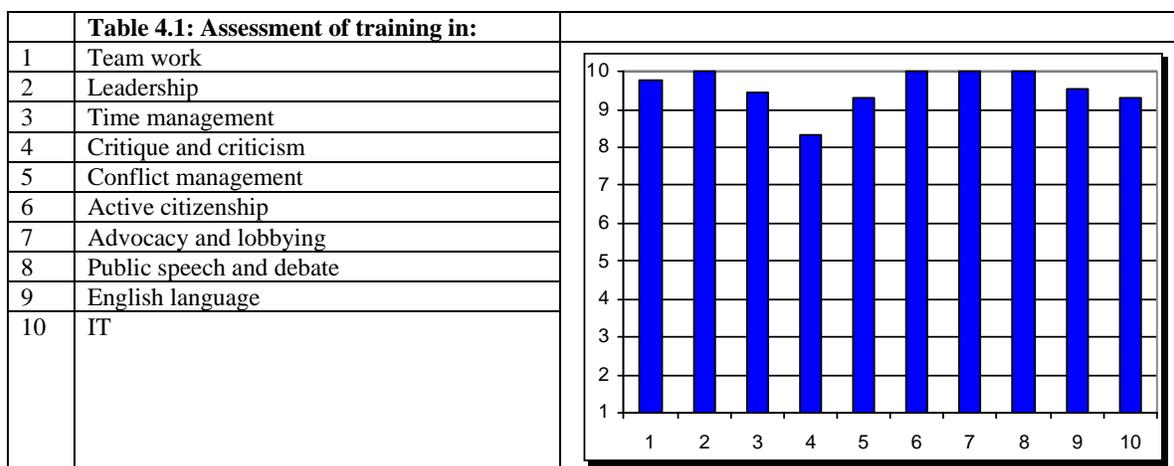
activities of informative and educational nature. There, we should firstly mention the great number of training events attended by a large number of students.

Table 4 offers insight into the numerous workshops implemented on specific topics. Students single out as most attractive for them learning foreign languages and courses in Active citizenship, Advocacy and lobbying, Public speech and debate, IT use and Time management.

| Table 4. Basic data on implemented workshops for students | | | | |
|--|----------------------|---------------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| Workshop topic | No. of training days | Number of students participants | | |
| | | USAID scholarship students | Other, | Total number of participants |
| Team work | 1 | 5 | 10 | 15 |
| Leadership | 1 | 5 | 9 | 14 |
| Time management | 1 | 4 | 14 | 18 |
| Critique and criticism | 1 | 4 | 9 | 13 |
| Conflict management | 1 | 3 | 8 | 11 |
| Active citizenship | 1 | 10 | 12 | 22 |
| Advocacy and lobbying | 2 | 10 | 12 | 22 |
| Public speech and debate | 2 | 10 | 12 | 22 |
| English language | / | 14 | 21 | 35 |
| IT | / | 10 | 10 | 20 |

The review shows that the majority of the activities are in direct correlation with the interests of the students, which indicates strong support not only in the course of their studies but also in the area of their personal development.

The high degree of satisfaction of students with the workshops speaks to their quality. The average grade the students - scholarship recipients award these activities is 9.48, on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being highest), which is almost a top mark for successfulness and quality. A similarly high grade was given to these activities also by the students - non-recipients of scholarships (9.16). All this testifies to the high degree of organization and efficiency in the work of Romaversitas in the implementation of these activities.

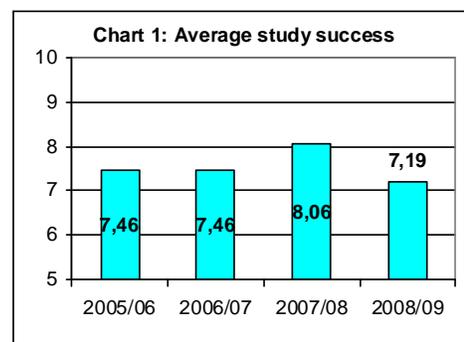


Somewhat less is the satisfaction with the offer for using the library, the internet and the learning facilities (7.03). If we know that at the majority of universities in the country there is free internet access and a high degree of computerization, as well as richer libraries and better spatial conditions to those available at Romaversitas, the still high degree of satisfaction displayed by the students it somewhat surprising. However, the advantage of Romaversitas is the flexibility to offer these services to the students after their activities at the faculties. Given that the majority of

them do not possess such facilities in the home, the availability of these services is highly significant to them.

Student achievements

The results show that the Roma students are characterized by an average success rate in their studies which is **7.19**²⁶, with no difference in the success rate between male and female students. Unlike in 2007/08, when the majority of them, or 73.46%, stated in the evaluation that the achievement was a realistic reflection of their abilities and demonstrated results, this year, close to half of the students believe that their grades are not a realistic reflection of their abilities. (Chart 1).



If we compare the achievement/success rate with that of the previous years, when a slight increase could be noticed, a decline in the achievements/success is evident. It is difficult to offer a valid interpretation for the reasons for this decline in achievements. It is apparent that this is due to the influence of a number of factors.

- 1) Only 3 students maintain that the teachers did not assess realistically their abilities and knowledge. Thus, the teachers are not the cause. The reasons must be sought outside of the universities.
- 2) As much as 91.43% stated that they attended classes regularly, unlike the previous year when that percentage was much lower. Thus, also attendance is not a reason.
- 3) Last year's evaluation indicated the emergence of a strong factor that negatively impacts student achievements, namely family problems, an issue which did not exert strong influence in the course of the previous years.
- 4) What the previous evaluation foretold emerged in full force this year. Nearly three quarters of the students (71.43%) stated that the poor domestic learning conditions and the family problems presented a significant obstacle in their learning. We need to bearing in mind that the global economic crisis impacted strongly the country, affecting intensely the most vulnerable population groups, increase the number of unemployed and caused financial impoverishment of the population. The Roma, traditionally the most vulnerable group in the country, are always hardest hit by any economic turbulence. It is to be assumed that this situation is not the only factor affecting the achievements of the Roma students, but it is definitely one of the most significant reasons for the declining study achievement/success rate.

The previous conclusions are to be understood only as an indication what needs to be monitored and paid greater attention to in the coming period. There is a need for identifying the problems related to the achievement and for overcoming them. FOSIM and Romaversitas need to pay greater attention to this issue, as there is a threat for this influence to cause more damage in the coming period than it is doing now.

Unlike previous year, when the number of students who had managed to enroll into the subsequent semester was only 76.32%, this year that number reached a full 100.00%. This means that maybe in this year a higher average mark was not attained, but the students are far more

²⁶ On a scale of 5 to 10, 5 being a failing grade.

successful in completing their study obligations than before. This speaks to the fact that in the course of last year, the disparities in the achievements were much greater than is the case now.

The evaluation confirmed the conclusion stated in the previous reports that the Program has managed not only to increase the number of Roma students in higher education, but also to help those enrolled to remain in education and progress successfully. Therefore, it is to be expected that higher education continues its affirmation in the Roma community and that the number of Roma students increases in future. In addition to the interventions of the state in this sphere, which have been increasing in recent times, the strongest influence in the improvement of this situation comes undoubtedly from this Program. This conclusion is also the opinion of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, which constantly stresses the need for increasing the educational level of the Roma as one of the most important conditions for improvement of their financial situation and enrichment of the culture of living.

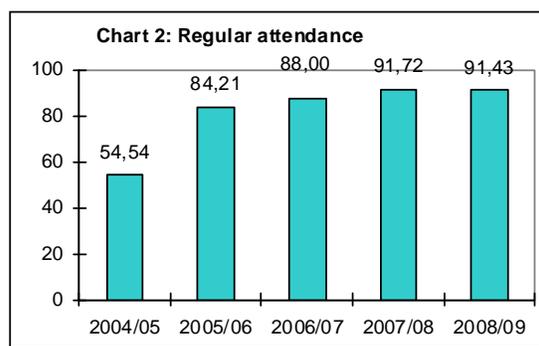
In comparison with the year 2004/05 when 44.44% and the year 2006/07 when 14.58% lost the entitlement to a scholarship due to poor learning results, data from 2008/09 represents a significant progress in the area of prevention of drop-out among Roma students in higher education. Only 8.57% of the students would abandon their studies if they did not receive a scholarship. It is evident that despite the problems these students face, they are determined and highly motivated to complete their education.

Despite the previous statement, it is evident that receiving the scholarship has a very motivating influence on the Roma students. All the more so as 82.86% stated that the scholarship is sufficient to cover their expenses and at the same it is a huge support to their families. In comparison to previous years, the role of the scholarship in the successful progress of the Roma students is somewhat more pronounced. We believe that this is due to the declining standard of living among the population and the increased studying costs.

This data again confirms the already ascertained fact that one of the most significant factors that adversely affect the participation of Roma in higher education is their poor financial status.

Student attendance

A confirmation of the successful development of the Program can be found in the fact that as regards the regular attendance, the Roma students have maintained the positive attendance trend expressed in 2006/07 and 2007/08. The implementation of the Bologna Recommendations in higher education in the Republic of Macedonia affirmed that regular attendance of teaching is one of the key factors for successful advancement of students. Because of this and also because of the stricter conditions for retaining the scholarship (success/achievements and regular attendance), this positive trend is not surprising at all.



However, it is not only the new organization of teaching in higher education that is the reason for the regular attendance of the students. We must take into account the influence of the Program as well. Evidence can be found in the fact that the USAID scholarship recipients demonstrate a better attendance rate (91.43%) in comparison to the students - non-recipients of scholarships, of

whom only 76.59% stated that they attend classes regularly. (Chart 2). Of the latter group, those students receiving a scholarship from another source also display a high attendance rate. It is evident that the preconditions for being awarded a scholarship have an impact on the improvement of the regular attendance of students.

Students and socialization

From the perspective of socialization, it is evident that the Roma students are exceptionally well integrated in higher education. As much as 94.11% of the interviewees stated that they felt good, that they were accepted by other students and maintained regular formal and informal contacts. Given that all previous evaluations of the Program established this situation, it could be concluded with certainty that discrimination is not present in the student milieu, and that Roma manage to successfully integrate in it.

From the viewpoint of socialization it is evident that the Roma students are extremely well integrated in higher education. As much as 94.11% of the interviewees stated that they felt good, that they were accepted by the other students, and that they maintained regular formal and non-formal contacts. Given that all previous evaluations of the Program confirm this assertion, we can with certainty conclude that in the academic milieu there is no occurrence of discrimination and that Roma are well integrated into it. Unlike the 2007/08 evaluation, when 20.00% of the students blamed teacher for unrealistic assessment, this year that percentage went down to 8.57%.

Students and Romaversitas:

The “Romaversitas” staff is a crucial factor for the implementation of the Program. They perform their function through maintenance of records and provision of logistical support to the Program, though detection and motivation of the students and organization of informative, educational and other activities.

In the course of 2008/09, FOSIM /Romaversitas implemented a full and diverse Program focused on the Roma students with the aim of improving their academic competencies and stimulating their motivation for learning. The program offered to the students consists of different types of activities of informative and educational nature.

The report reveals that the majority of the activities are in direct correlation with the interests of the students, which ensures strong support not only in the course of their studying but also in the area of their personal development.

The implementation of the activities in the past and the strong support Romaversitas provides to the Roma students increased its reputation among the students. Both categories of indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the cooperation with Romaversitas. It is worth mentioning that no student expressed dissatisfaction with the work on this Program. This is also backed up by the high degree of agreement among the students that the contribution of Romaversitas in the realization of the Program is significant, thus confirming the conclusion that Romaversitas plays a key role in the achievement of the Program objectives.

Information received on Romaversitas activities came from an array of sources (other students, the Romaversitas web page and Romaversitas staff. This clearly speaks to the fact that the popularity of Romaversitas is increasing among the students and so is its attractiveness not only to the scholarship recipients of USAID but also to other students as well.

It is encouraging to see that information on the activities being implemented is obtained through direct contact between the Romaversitas staff and the students and much rarer through the Romaversitas web page and through the word of mouth, i.e. other students. A testimony to the successful work of Romaversitas on the realization of the Program is the fact that the students rated highly the contribution of Romaversitas in their progress and that the activities realized were marked by a high level of organization and in accordance with the needs of the students.

The 2007/08 evaluation concluded that one of the weaknesses in the work of Romaversitas was the poor communication with the students who were not USAID scholarship recipients. It is apparent that this shortcoming has been overcome with much success.

The second established weakness, lack of feedback and monitoring of beneficiaries of the services provided by Romaversitas, has also been resolved. An efficient mechanism has been established for maintaining contact with all service beneficiaries. For the needs of the 2008/09 evaluation, a thorough review of all students who have used the Romaversitas services was compiled, regardless whether they were scholarship recipients of USAID or not.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The Roma Decade in the Republic of Macedonia was marked by several state efforts for creation of strategic and operational documents for supporting the Roma in the country. However, the greatest contribution in the realization of the priorities of this decade was given by USAID, REF and FOSIM/ Romaversitas, who through the Program for Supporting Roma Students realized a success story in the Republic of Macedonia, which is continuing. The efforts to improve the status and the achievements/success in the studying of the Roma population are enormous albeit filled with a great number of obstacles. Their effort represents a true model for the compensation of the state efforts in the resolving of the Roma issue in higher education.

The evaluation confirmed the high degree of satisfaction not only in the part of the students - scholarship recipients but also of the other students as well, with the cooperation with Romaversitas.

The main goal of the Program: Increasing the Retention Rate and Personal Capacities of Roma University Students is being continuously and successfully achieved and the objectives set in the Program have been realized in full.

The Program objectives: To provide tutor support for the Roma university students from Macedonia who are in need; To ensure supplementary academic support to advance the students' learning capacities; To provide open opportunities for small-size students' initiatives and projects, and To make other services available to all Roma students by maintaining the education hub (located in the centre of Skopje), by providing PC- and Internet access and by providing access to primary and secondary academic literature as well as other sources of information, have been achieved in full.

As regards the learning, the students are progressing successfully within their potentials. What characterizes them are their high level of motivation and their resolve to successfully complete their studies. The problems that emerge and that might impede the learning and the overall progress of the students are strong deterrents and reflect themselves negatively on the success of the students, but are yet not strong enough to dissuade them from studying.

The tutorship system is operating with success and has proven itself to be a good solution for overcoming the problems present in the mentorship system and it can be expected in the coming period to be accepted by the majority of Roma students.

Given the worsening of the economic situation in the country and the weakening of the financial status of the families, activities need to be undertaken to mitigate their negative influence on the students. It could easily happen that the family financial power and the additional work of the students in order to supplement the family budget emerge as strong negative impact factors in the coming period.

Romaversitas needs to continue its work, which it does with success, and to continually take into account the needs and interests of the students in order to be able to meet them suitably and in time. It is obvious that in the coming period it needs to ensure continuance and strengthening of activities of educational nature, for which interest was expressed by the majority of students.

The communication with the students needs to be strengthened i.e. “more intense” work needs to be done with those students who have reservation in the abilities of the tutor to aid them. Maybe the establishment of a suitable office for career guidance and advice which would develop a more mobile and direct communication with the students could help resolve the respective issues.

The involvement of the students who are not recipients of scholarships from USAID proved itself to be a correct step and needs to be nurtured and enhanced.

Skopje, 2009

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