



ROMA
EDUCATION FUND
Invest | Educate | Engage

2017
ANNUAL REPORT
HIGHLIGHTS

*Mother and son interact
during a visit to the REF Toy Library
in Fakulteta District in Sofia, Bulgaria in July 2017.
Photography ©2017 REF | Dia Photography*



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Chairman's Message

Two outstanding projects implemented by the REF Network in 2017 deserve to be highlighted:

- For the first time, REF led the construction and refurbishment of 10 kindergartens in some of Romania's poorest localities, supported by the Norway Grants.
- REF's branch office in Serbia began providing secondary school scholarships and facilitating the transition of Roma youth into the labor market in a project supported by KfW.

These two projects focusing on both the start and end of students' school careers reflect REF's commitment to the education of Roma children and youth, and also suggest a new avenue for REF to concentrate on in the future in tackling the persistent challenge of systematic segregation of Roma children in Europe's schools and classrooms.

There are several factors that maintain this practice in Europe. Roma nominally enjoy constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination as citizens; in practice, however, they face deep discrimination rooted in popular prejudices and stereotypes.

It is no coincidence that some national legislation has been devised in such a way to not directly discriminate against Roma but to indirectly create such a result. Such laws might outline the conditions for setting up special education institutions (where Roma children have been ruinously directed and, as a result, overrepresented) or provide caregivers the right to decide where their child is enrolled (contributing to white flight from schools that are predominantly Roma).

Differences between East and West suggest an interesting paradox. Despite segregation, notable groups of educated Roma leaders emerged in the East, whereas in the West, thought of as being more inclusive (for example, in the United Kingdom, the inclusion of Roma migrant children into so-called super-diversity schools), an educated Roma stratum is missing. This paradox indicates a more formal "inclusion" in the West and a more "resilient" attitude to education by some parents and children in the East.

REF and its donors have also played a part in creating such a difference, as its scholarship schemes have exclusively supported Roma students in the former Decade of Roma Inclusion countries.

Below I consider some avenues for further exploration.

- Roma parents need to be empowered to speak out publicly, as a powerful constituency that can impact policy makers.
- Standing together and forming a coalition against segregation – whether with the European Commission in Brussels, national equality bodies or civil society actors, including Roma organizations – is better suited to bring results. The evidence where inclusive education has brought about concrete and lasting outcomes needs to be shared widely to change the mindset of the majority.
- We need to persevere with our efforts to develop a sense of "resilience" in parents and pupils, along with efforts to increase their self-esteem and pride in their ethnic identity. To this end, qualified and trusted staff, including Roma teaching staff, must remain one of REF's top priorities.
- Finally, there are many "community schools" where REF can concentrate its support in order to turn them into "quality schools" that remain open and inclusive to all children. REF plans to study several refreshing new grass-roots initiatives in specific localities and explore how parents were mobilized and engaged, building their resilience and ensuring their children's future prospects and opportunities.

Andrzej Mirga
Chair



Grants Program

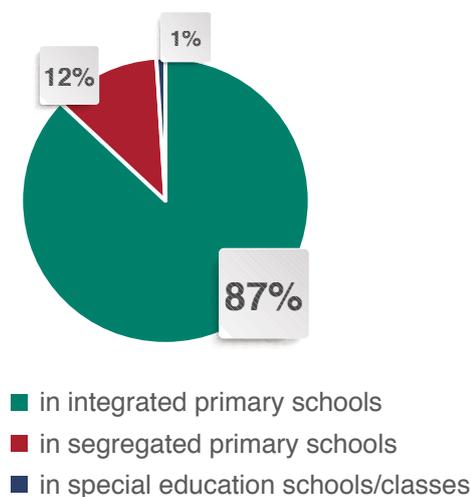
In 2017 REF supported and implemented 61 projects, worth €1.8 million, in 13 countries.

2016 -17 Academic Year

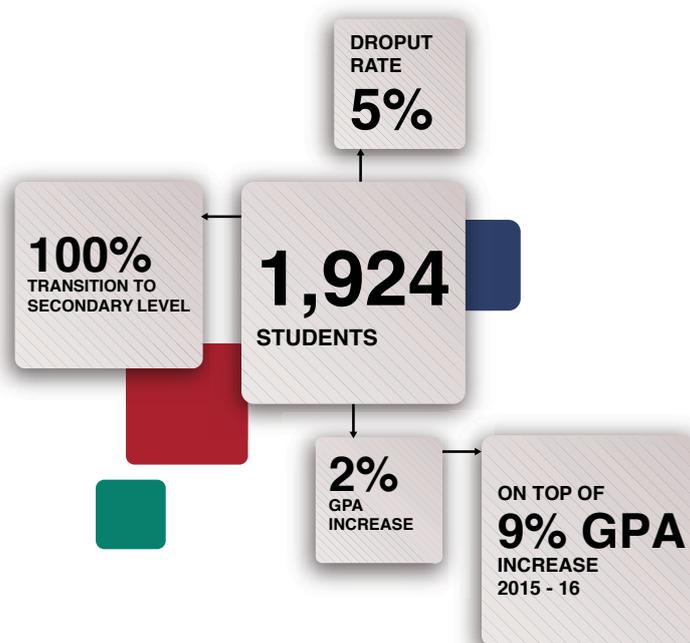
Early childhood education program



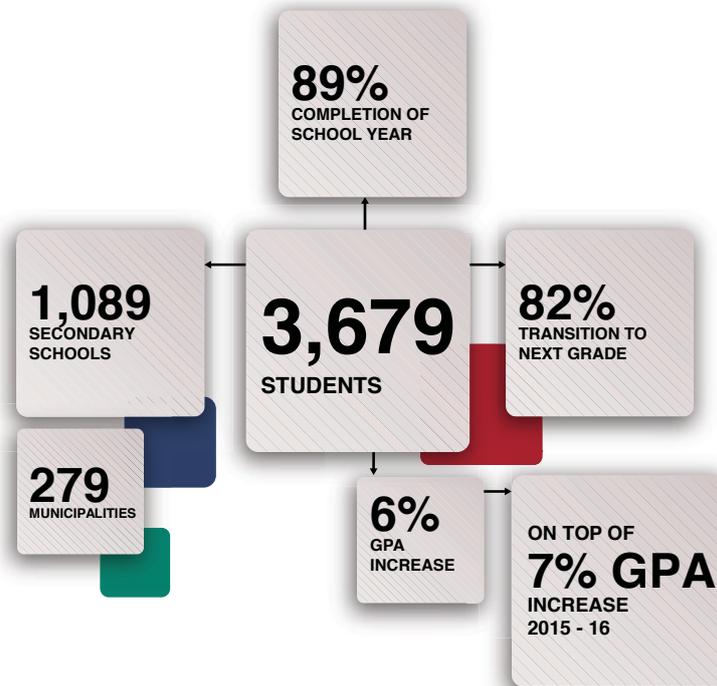
REF Kindergarten Beneficiaries Enrolled



Primary education



Secondary education



Tertiary education

17 RomaVersitas centers provide academic and professional development support to Roma students in 8 countries.

Number of Tertiary Students in RomaVersitas Centers

RomaVersitas	Number of students
Albania	80
Bulgaria	128
Hungary	80
Kosovo	80
Macedonia	160
Moldova	55
Romania	80
Serbia	65

RomaVersitas students from Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia report the highest rate of employment **(75% on average)**.

Adult education

443 adults took part in Second Chance Education Programs.

10%

of the adult Roma women and men were employed after acquiring primary or secondary school certificates in Macedonia (Second Chance program).

2%

dropout rate among the adult learners in Albania and Macedonia.

Spotlight



Sonila Ademi

*Sonila Ademi is a mother of three from Rrapishte, a Roma community in Elbasan, Albania.
Photography © 2017 REF*

Since attending parenting sessions for over a year organized by local Roma NGO Romano Sezi, Sonila has been reading stories to her children regularly and encouraging them to discuss the stories with her. At home, she's put together a small library from the books she's received from Your Story, a women's literacy empowerment program supported by REF. Due to her attendance at the parenting sessions, her role has changed in the community, too. She's become a mediator, active in advising other mothers on practical parenting

skills to ensure their children are healthy and meeting early childhood development milestones. Sonila said of the perspectives offered by this program, "I enrolled Ermela in kindergarten and Erion in school and I'm very keen to talk to the teachers about their progress." She added, "Romano Sezi has hired me to translate in the kindergarten and help both Roma children and their teachers."

Entering the labor market in Serbia

Participants in Improved Education and Integration Opportunities for Roma in Serbia, Employment Empowerment of Young Roma, and Reintegration of Returnees after completing further vocational education training in welding.

Photography © 2017 REF Serbia

Nemanja Nedeljković is one of five Roma students who graduated with a certificate in industrial welding at the Goša Institute in July 2017. He said, "I was a REF scholarship recipient and my mentor helped me apply. I gained a lot of experience during the four months, and my employment opportunities improved: a job offer came from one company in Pirot, and I also had an offer to work in Slovakia."



Stefan Durmišević has also shared his impressions: "I was impressed by my instructor's care when welding corners. I received an offer for work in a Pirot-based company specializing in the production and installation of basketball hoops and constructions."

Žarko Vasov underlined the tangible opportunities that come with welding certification. "I received an offer from the Goša Institute and there is possibility of employment in the assembly line as an installer, which means that I can stay in Smederevska Palanka after the training."

The words of Nemanja, Stefan and Žarko are encouraging signs that education and employment, given the right level of care and intervention, do produce results.

Tertiary Scholarship Program

The Roma Education Fund Scholarship Program (REF SP) facilitates Roma students' access to higher education, strengthens their academic efforts during their studies and helps them to successfully graduate. REF SP offers four merit-based scholarship schemes in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe and Turkey.

Academic outcomes

2017 -18 Academic Year

Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program supported **950** students in 11 countries. Students received **€800** support for the academic year to cover basic study and living expenses, as well as up to **€800** to cover tuition fees.

Law and Humanities Program in Moldova, Russia and Ukraine supported **208** students who received **€2,300** to cover basic study and living expenses, as well as additional tuition fee support up to **€1,000**. LHP offers grants for small-scale projects aimed at advancing the development of Roma communities at the local level. The annual student conference brought together 50 LHP students and alumni.

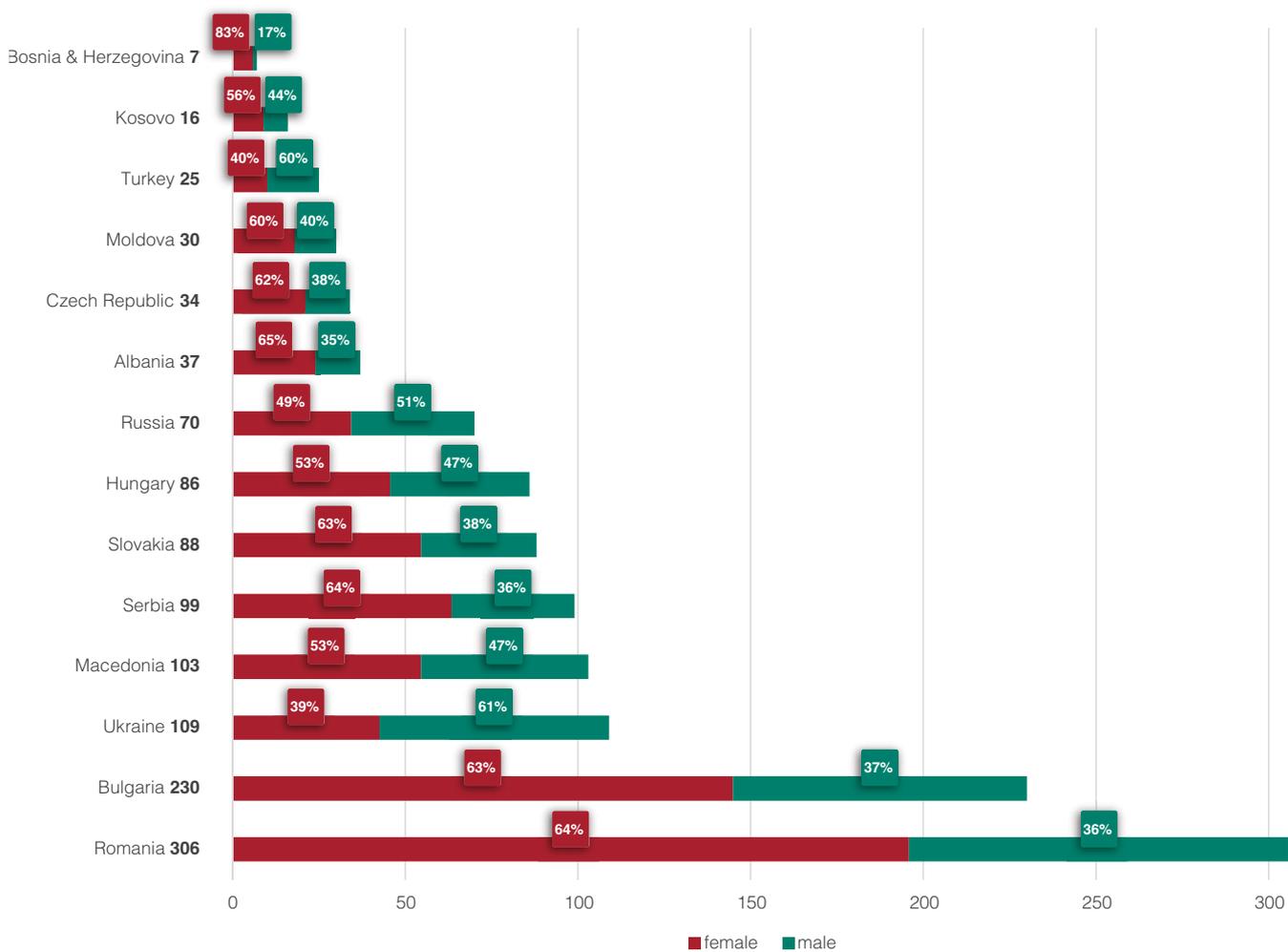
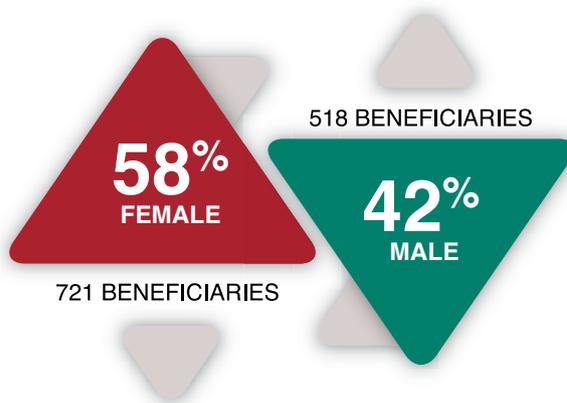
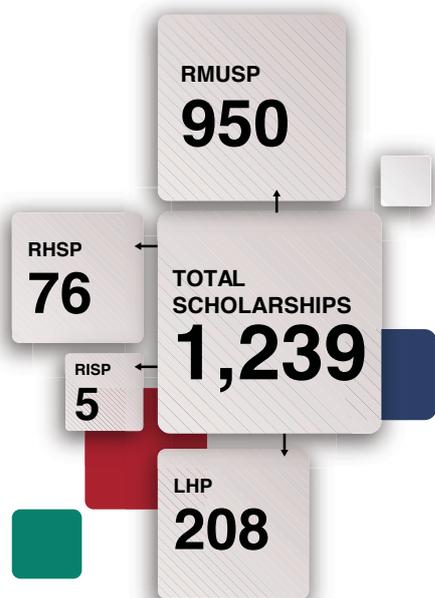
Roma Health Scholarship Program supported **76** students at vocational or tertiary level in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia. They received **between €1,420 and €3,335**, depending on the country and the level of studies. The third annual regional students' conference brought together 30 RHSP students and alumni.

Roma International Scholar Program supported **5** students from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine who received financial support of an average **€6,610** to study outside their home countries in Master or Doctorate programs at universities in Estonia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Romani Studies Program at Central European University (CEU) – where many young Roma scholars begin their international academic journey

This new academic unit, opened in summer 2017 and chaired by Dr. Iulius Rostas, continues to develop the potential of students through the Roma Graduate Preparation Program, while recruiting faculty and students to join this newest MA program. With this welcome prospect for a new, innovative hub of Roma-led research in the region, REF agreed to support **10 Roma MA students** each year.

2017-18 Academic Year



Spotlight



Klára Gulyás

is a single mother, activist, social worker and now is studying for a PhD in Cultural Anthropology. She attends Eszterházy Károly University in Eger and is a first time REF scholarship recipient.

I live every minute of my life as a Roma woman, as the mother of my daughter, as a professional in my job, and none of these roles weaken me. On the contrary – my roles interconnect, they shape me, and I shape them through living life. [...] Along the way, I aimed for nothing less than to fight against Roma stereotypes that depicted me as less capable than my peers. It's vital for me to succeed based upon my real knowledge, and that it is not mistaken for positive discrimination. The REF scholarship helps me get one step closer to achieving my dreams. Besides the financial support, I am grateful for the new opportunities that it brings and belonging to a community of young Roma professionals with whom I can engage in professional discourse. I've been waiting a long time for that.

Yulian Kondur



is a Ukrainian law student from Izmail, near Odessa. He originally received a scholarship for four years from REF's Law and Humanities Program. He also attended the Roma Graduate Preparation Program at Central European University. He is currently supported under REF's Roma International Scholar Program and studying International Law and Human Rights at the University of Tartu, Estonia. Yulian is an integral part of a new generation of Roma equipped with the tools to contribute to the development of their communities.

Before engaging in the NGO sector, my mom and dad were professional Roma musicians and dancers and also were well respected among Roma. This later led to the establishment of a Roma youth center in my hometown. I've been continuously involved in all kinds of civic activities that my family has been running.

I chose to study law because I wanted to learn how to make the society where I live a better place for everyone. Human rights law has gradually become both my academic as well as practical field of activities. Therefore, I see myself working in this area in the future, particularly in advocacy.

Communication Grants

Do You Speak Meow – Learning Romani

Producer: Media Content Studio, €3,500 grant

TV series, 15 episodes, broadcast by local TV stations in Serbia (TV LAV Vrsac, RTV Vojvodine, TV Forum, TV Kovacica-Novı Sad, RTV Stara Pazova and RTV2) and available to borrow out at REF's five Toy Libraries in Serbia.



Do You Speak Meow – production still



Still from preproduction of Bad Words

Bad Words

Producer: ArtAkcija, €9,000 grant

TV program, 30 episodes aired nationally on Radio Television Serbia; aimed at youth audience (in Romanes and Serbian) and targeting popular culture and multicultural background of today's generation of young Serbian children, both Roma and non-Roma.

Online tutorial for prospective Roma university students in Hungary

Producer: Unitut, €6,100 grant

Home Away from Home

Producer: Romawood, €8,500 grant

Documentary presenting REF's efforts and achievements in desegregating the primary school in Konik refugee camp in the capital of Podgorica, Montenegro

Rising to the Top

Producer: REF Communications. Videographer: Markus Stein, €5,200 grant

Video blog featuring 11 prominent Roma artists, activists and academics speaking about their personal and educational journeys

Longitudinal photography of Roma children in Macedonia, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary

Photographer: Robert Miskovics, €2,800 grant

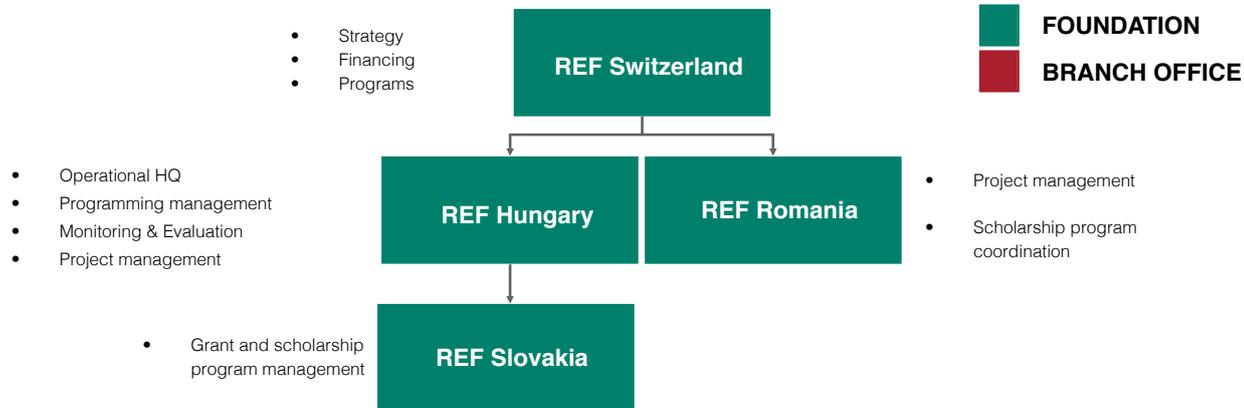
Dream to Dream: Bulgarian Roma Gain Traction and Skills in Secondary Education

Photographer: Raycho Chaprazov, €6,500 grant

Photographic portraits of Secondary Scholarship Students in Bulgaria

The REF Network

FOUNDATIONS



BRANCH NETWORK



REF Switzerland (REF CH)

REF CH allocated €1.6 million for grants and €1.83 million for the tertiary scholarship program, as well as €245,543 for technical assistance, advocacy and capacity building,

In 2016 REF management introduced a comprehensive risk management framework, reviewed and improved its donor reporting practices and key financial processes, and started strengthening and restructuring the operations and cooperation of REF Network entities. This initiative continued in 2017: an Internal Control System was introduced and Operational Guidelines were revised to further strengthen REF operations and mitigate risk.

REF Hungary (REF HU)

Besides managing the core programs of REF and being the headquarters of the REF network, REF HU was active in 2017 in the implementation of a number of educational projects financed by various donors through its offices in Hungary, Montenegro and Serbia:

- Implementation of a three-year, €2.4 million project, funded by KfW, to improve the education, integration and employment opportunities for Roma in Serbia
- Continuing the implementation of the third phase of an early childhood education project at Konik Camp, Montenegro, in partnership with Help – Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e. V.
- Continuing the implementation of the HEIM research project funded by the Executive Research Agency of the European Commission
- Continuing the secondary scholarship project, funded by the VELUX Foundations, for Roma female students studying pedagogy in Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, and expanded to Romania

- Completing with REF Romania the implementation of Ready Set Go! in Romania, funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and aiming at providing comprehensive early childhood services in marginalized communities
- Implementation of the secondary scholarship program in Montenegro funded by the Ministry of Human Rights and Minorities and REF
- Started the implementation of knowhow exchange project, funded by Central European Initiative, that aims to transfer the monitoring and evaluation knowledge of the REF secondary scholarship program to project partners (Ministries and project staff) in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

REF Romania (REF RO)

REF RO successfully finished the implementation of Ready Set Go! – Increasing Early Childhood Development Outcomes for Roma Children, which targeted early childhood development outcomes for some 1,400 Roma children. Ready, Set, Go! was supported by a grant through the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, in the framework of the “RO 25 Poverty Alleviation Programme in Romania.” The total grant amount was €2.43 million.

As a follow-up to the best practices of this project REF RO started a second phase of Ready Set Go! with the support of Open Society Foundations’ Early Childhood Program and ADECO.

A new ESF-funded project was launched by REF RO, *Integrated Measures for Disadvantaged Groups from Harsova*, aiming to develop integrated programs for pupils and their parents in vulnerable groups to increase participation in preschool, primary and secondary education.

As a sign of the successful cooperation among REF Network entities, REF RO implemented the RomaVersitas project in Bucharest and coordinated REF Tertiary Scholarship Programs in Romania. In addition REF RO implemented Romanian share of the VELUX scholarship project (€146,853).

REF RO continued their activities in the field of advocacy and lobbying for improvement and change relevant policies in Romania.

REF Slovakia (REF SK)

In 2017, REF SK continued the implementation of REF’s secondary scholarship program to improve school academic performance of disadvantaged secondary school students, their attendance rate, graduation rate, transition rate from secondary to tertiary education and to decrease their dropout rate in Slovakia, in the grant amount of €68,340.

REF SK participates in the implementation of the VELUX project, in partnership with REF Hungary in Slovakia and Czech Republic, and provides local coordination for REF’s Tertiary Scholarship program and country facilitator services to the Grant Program managed by REF Switzerland.

REF Slovakia started a strategic cooperation with the Ministry of Interior of Slovakia and benefited by almost €20,000 from the government.

Finance & Administration

Sources of Funds and Spending of REF Foundations in 2017 (€)

	REF SWITZERLAND	REF HUNGARY	REF ROMANIA	REF SLOVAKIA	Combined
Opening foundation capital	440,896	415,857	579,368	-119,726	1,316,395
Third party donor income	6,629,721	1,423,000	536,433	20,000	8,609,154
Other income	98,964	4,130	8,705	1,427	113,226
Total Sources	7,169,581	1,842,987	1,124,506	-98,299	10,038,775
Transfers within REF network		2,223,958	821,596	127,052	3,172,606
TOTAL SOURCES WITH TRANSFERS	7,169,581	4,066,945	1,946,102	28,753	13,211,381
Grant program	1,603,775	0	175,267	68,340	1,847,382
Tertiary scholarship program	1,831,880	139,741	38,697	9,168	2,019,486
Own educational projects	59,187	1,276,754	1,662,860	86,565	3,085,366
Capacity building, policy development and communications	245,543	625,236	299,912	0	1,170,691
Administrative expenses	178,379	976,160	0	0	1,154,539
Other expenses	346,080	24,070	52,000	0	422,150
Accumulated capital	477,010	764,958	-282,634	-135,320	824,014
Total spending	4,741,854	3,806,919	1,946,102	28,753	10,523,628
Transfers within REF network	2,427,727	260,026	0	0	2,687,753
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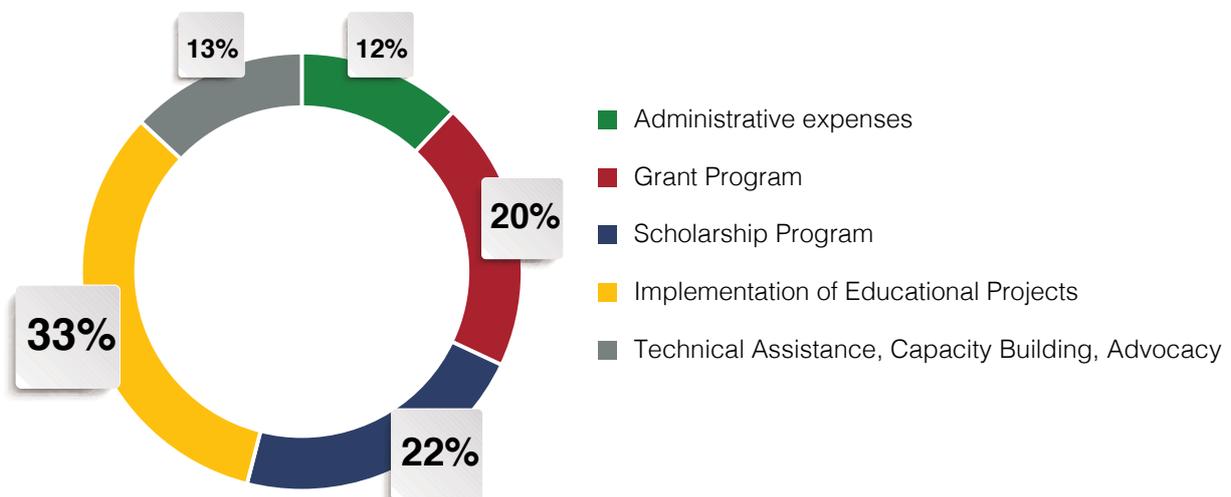
From total overall funding of €10 million, REF spent €1.8 million on new grants contracted in its grant program in 13 countries and €2 million on tertiary scholarship programs for Roma students in 16 countries. Altogether REF spending under these two programs in 2017 is allocated to the main educational models of REF as follows:

Commitments of REF Foundations in 2017 by Educational Model

MODEL	NUMBER OF NEW PROJECTS CONTRACTED IN 2017	FUNDS COMMITTED IN 2017 (€)
Early Childhood Education	22	623,385
Primary Education	10	281,616
Secondary Education	3	261,131
Tertiary Education	n/a ¹	2,662,776
Adult Education	2	37,960
TOTAL		3,866,868

In 2017, REF developed and implemented nine projects from funding provided, inter alia, by the European Union, Norway Grants, KfW, OSCE and VELUX FOUNDATIONS, with a total spending of €3.0 million. A further €1.17 million was spent on technical assistance, capacity building and advocacy. The total administrative expenses, €1.15 million, represent 12 percent of total spending.

2017 spending by program (mil €, %)



¹ Includes the beneficiaries of REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program and eight RomaVersitas projects.

Feature story

Roma Adult Employment in Macedonia



Raisa Galiova and Edvin Saliov

Raisa Galiova from Vinica, Roma mother to one child, completed her official secondary education through REF's EU-funded adult education project. She is currently employed in a textile factory in Vinica.

Edvin Saliov from Vinica completed the Faculty of Philology (majoring in English language and Literature). He was engaged as a Roma mediator in Vinica through REF's EU-funded adult education project. At the moment he is employed at the Roma NGO Kham in Delcevo as a local coordinator of Kham for Vinica.

Donors and governments increasingly are asking REF how the foundation intends to not only close the gap in educational outcomes but how it will bridge the gap to employment for Roma participants in its programs. Although the organization has yet to formalize the expansion of its mission beyond classrooms and the policies that affect them, REF has begun to explore this complex and dynamic terrain where employment is even more uncertain than education for Roma adults.

Two projects implemented by REF in Macedonia over the last two years – and funded by the European Union's Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance – aimed to give adults a second chance to complete their education and encourage their chances of employment success. What no one could be sure of at the beginning was what turned out to be the positive results: 36 Roma adults have since found official employment.

The TRENTEKS garment factory in Delcevo, a small mountain town in eastern Macedonia near the Bulgarian border, has hired several Roma employees who participated in REF's second chance projects.

Thank You!

We would like to thank all of the individuals and civil society organizations with whom we have partnered in 2017.

The work we do would not be possible without the enthusiastic participation of children, parents, teachers, schools, government officials, and policymakers.

Thanks to our supporters for making all our achievements possible in 2017!

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 City of Ostrava
 Council of Europe Development Bank
 European Commission
 European Voluntary Service
 EVZ Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future"
 Government of Macedonia, Ministry of Finance
 Government of Montenegro, Ministry for Human and Minority Rights
 Government of Montenegro, Ministry of Education
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 Help, Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e.V.
 KfW Development Bank
 Norway Grants
 Open Society Foundations
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 Romanian Ministry of European Funds
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 The VELUX FOUNDATIONS
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University



REF Network

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