

## SERBIA

### COUNTRY SITUATION AND REF WORKING STRATEGY

#### 1. Country data:

Population size<sup>1</sup>: 8.150.000, of which 56,8% is urban. Cohort size at the age of 7 is currently about 86.000, and in recent years is declining by about 1100 each year.

Income: GDP per capita 2004 is US\$2620 and has been growing rapidly since 2000 (almost 5%pa). Serbia receives a relatively significant amount of aid amounting to US\$146 per capita in 2003.

Education expenditure as a percent of GDP has risen to 3.5% in 2004 from a low of 2.5% in 2000. However it is still below the 4.4% of 1997 and below the level that would be a norm for Serbia's income level.

#### Roma population in Serbia (official vs. non-official)

Population data based on the official census from 2002 register 108 000 Roma inhabitants. Unofficial NGO estimates ranged up to 800.000, but a consolidated estimate of 450-500 000 Roma in Serbia is currently used both by the Government and the civil sector. This constitutes about 6,2% of the population. Approximate Roma cohort size at age 7, based on this estimate, is currently 10.000. Uncertainty in respect of demographic data in Serbia is additionally raised by the population mobility during the 90's with refugee movement in all directions. Roma refugees most often arrived to Serbia but did not get registered. Also, after 2000, several tens of thousands of asylum-seeking Roma in Western countries were also readmitted to Serbia, additionally increasing the population size. Hence the Roma population in Serbia consists of: (i) native Roma, speaking Romani and/or Serbian or, in some cases, Hungarian; (ii) refugees and internally displaced persons, speaking Romani and/or Serbo-Croat or for a large percentage Albanian, and (iii) readmittees speaking Romani and/or EU languages.

Fifty percent of Roma are living in the 573 Roma Settlements, scattered throughout Serbia, with major concentrations around Belgrade, in Vojvodina and in Southeast Serbia (see map in Annex). About 300 of these are in urban areas, the remainder in suburban or rural areas; 44% are slums and unhygienic settlements: while only 11% of settlements are developed. Roma settlements are struggling with legalization barriers, and in urban areas, resettlement plans<sup>2</sup>.

According to recent assessments, Roma are significantly poorer than the Serbian population in general. Based on recent World Bank indices, an estimated 60.5 percent of the Roma population are considered „very poor“ as compared to 6.1 percent of the general population. When these numbers are adjusted to indicate depth of poverty, the

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<sup>1</sup> Data refer to 2002 Census in Serbia without Kosovo

<sup>2</sup> *Roma settlements, living conditions and possibilities for integration of Roma in Serbia*, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and NGO Center for Ethnicity Research, Belgrade, 2002

gap is even greater. Among poor Roma, women and children are at particular risk, with poverty rising significantly for larger households and for female-headed households. Poverty is also highly correlated with the education and employment status of the head of household. Roma face significantly higher unemployment rates across all age cohorts and all educational outcomes than non-Roma with rates 2.5 times the general average for the prime working age cohort of 35-44 years. Even employed Roma are more vulnerable with only 20 percent of Roma household heads having a full-time job compared to 60 percent for the general population. Roma are overrepresented in unskilled jobs (which account for 90 percent of employed Roma) and in seasonal and part-time work. Roma unemployment is also significantly higher across all educational levels indicating that the Roma face serious obstacles to realizing the returns to education even for those relatively few graduating from secondary and tertiary institutions. Finally Roma are four times as likely to be affected by chronic illness and disease than the general population.

## **2. Political and Social Situation**

### **Government structure, mandate and finance**

The current Serbian Government is in place from February 2004. It is a minority Government (101 seats of 250), composed of representatives of 3 political groups of the conservative centre: the Serbian Democratic Party, the G 17 Plus party, and the coalition of the Serbian Renewal Movement and New Serbia. The Government is dependent on votes also from opposition party members, and is supported by the Socialist Party of Serbia. The line Ministries are distributed among the coalition members, and the Senior Management (Ministers and Deputies) of respective Ministries are most often members of the same party.

The Serbian government has pursued a program of fiscal and structural adjustment since 2001, with positive impact on overall growth. This program has been strongly supported by the international community including the IMF, World Bank and other partners. One of the key pillars of the program has been a reduction in the overall size of government, given the fact that Serbia continues to have the largest public sector in the region. This has been accomplished through a strict program of fiscal adjustment which has resulted in a shift from a deficit of -3% of GDP in 2003 to a positive balance (savings) of 2.5% of GDP projected for 2006. This has been achieved through a combination of revenue growth including the introduction of VAT in 2005 and expenditure restraint (expenditures fell almost 4 percentage points during this period with the greatest decrease in transfers and subsidies but reductions in the government salary bill as well. Given that overall demand in the economy continues to be strong resulting in significant pressures on Serbia's external accounts, government finances are expected to continue to remain very tight with increases in revenues channelled largely into government savings with small increases in public investment. In this environment, there will be little scope for new programs which are not compensated by reductions elsewhere in the budget. Education with its substantial share of the government wage bill can be expected to be under continuing pressure to effect efficiency gains.

Serbia currently has a highly centralized government structure in terms of both finances and responsibilities. Municipalities and cities have yet to be assigned major responsibilities for service delivery or ownership of public assets (such as schools and hospitals). As a result the share of local revenue in GDP is low – around 6%. The bulk of these resources (80%) are transferred from the central authorities and half of that amount is subject to the Annual Law on Tax Sharing, the result of a highly political negotiation. Largely as a result of this system, there is great inequality in the per-capita revenues of municipalities with the upper quartile receiving over twice the per-capita revenue of the bottom quartile while the four cities receive over twice the per-capita revenue of the top quarter of municipalities. Discussions are currently underway to reform both local government finances and to increase the substantive responsibility of local authorities. Given the inequities in the current system there is a danger that poorer localities with large concentrations of Roma could find themselves even worse off with greater responsibilities.

### **Responsibility for education (administrative/political)**

The Ministry of Education and Sports is responsible for the entire education system, from preschool to University level, both for general and for vocational education and training. For the Province of Vojvodina certain administrative, inspection and management responsibilities for education are held by the Provincial Secretariat for Education, part of the Vojvodina Government. For education in minority languages, National Minority Councils (hence also the National Council for Roma National Minority, i.e. its education committee) have the authority for curriculum and textbook approval in subject areas of relevance for them.

The Minister and part of the senior management of the Ministry are representatives of a small political party in coalition with the currently ruling party (Serbian Democratic Party), others are representatives of the ruling party. The Secretary of the Vojvodina Secretariat is representative of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians' Party, while the Provincial Government is composed from a coalition where the Democratic Party (which is currently in opposition on national level) prevails. Both the fact that the Minister and the Secretary represent smaller political parties and the difference in the governing coalitions between the Serbian and Provincial levels can create uncertainties in medium or long term policies. The current minister is the second minister during the term of the current government.

Neither the Ministry nor the Secretariat has a Department for Minorities or Roma; in the Ministry there is one Roma advisor.

### **Roma representation in government/Parliament**

There are 18 registered political parties of Roma in Serbia, 3 of them active (Unija Roma Srbije, Socijaldemokratska Partija Roma Srbije –Sloga and Kongresna Romska Partija) but none of them is represented in parliament nor in government. These parties need political experience and their activities are of low intensity, so that Roma do not vote for them. However, there are Roma representatives in several municipal councils.

### **Responsibilities for Roma affairs and Decade**

The current National Coordinator for the Roma Decade is the Deputy Minister for Human and Minority Rights, a Ministry on the Serbia and Montenegro Union level, without direct links to the Serbian Government. A secretariat for the Roma Strategy is situated in this Ministry, with 2-3 staff. At the level of the Serbian Government a Council for National Minority<sup>3</sup> (one of them being the National Council of the Roma National Minority) is established, and serves as the contact point on Roma issues to the Prime Minister. Most decade related activities are coordinated in close cooperation between the National Coordinator, the Roma Secretariat, the President of the Roma Council and the Government Coordinator for the Minority Councils, involving also the working groups for the 4 Decade Action Plans, where Roma NGOs have strong representation.

In the Vojvodina Government the Secretariat for Minority Rights has recently also set up a Roma Unit, with the aim to coordinate activities related to the Decade.

City of Belgrade established Coordination Centre and the Council for Roma Inclusion. In a number of municipalities in Serbia coordinators for Roma issues are being engaged.

There are currently no data on the financing of the Roma Decade.

### **Status with key international and regional partners – EU, OECD, etc**

Serbia is currently a member only of the Council of Europe and of the United Nations – in both cases readmission after the 90's happened in the early 2000s. The EU accession process for Serbia is in its beginning phase: the feasibility study has been accepted in spring 2005, and negotiations started in autumn of the same year. There are several conditions to the accession process, including cooperation with the War Crimes Tribunal in Hague. Serbia is not participating in any EU organisations (except the Stability Pact), and is not eligible for any EU programs in education, except Tempus. EU funds are accessed through a special program, CARDS, administered through the European Agency for Reconstruction.

The status of Serbia is expected to face additional challenges in the near future: independence of Kosovo, and the dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro can happen already in 2006.

### **Political Opposition – composition, structure, and relation to Roma issues**

There are three major political opposition parties represented in Parliament, the right-wing Serbian Radical Party (which was in Government during the 90's and was seen as responsible for the war in ex-Yugoslavia) with 80 seats, the Democratic Party (which was in Government 2000-2004, and is currently the majority party in the governing coalition in Vojvodina, as well as in about 50% of the municipalities, and is the party of the current President of Serbia) with 33 seats, and the left-wing Socialist Party of Serbia (which was the governing party continuously till 2000, and is currently supporting the Government) with 22 seats. Most of the preparatory activities of the Decade, including the development of the Action Plans, were organized and coordinated during the term of the Democratic Party, hence there still is a certain commitment of the members of this party to Roma integration, visible also at municipal level. The Serbian

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<sup>3</sup> Council consists of Ministers relevant for national minority issues and presidents of the national councils; secretary and two additional staff. Chaired by Prime minister.

Radical Party has the reputation of a nationalist right wing party, however, an active anti-Roma policy is not visible on their agenda.

### **Legal status – anti-bias, discrimination legislation, compliance and enforcement**

Serbia and Montenegro abide by the following international laws: the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education. Domestically, however there is as yet no general legislation nor regulations against discrimination. A law against discrimination has been prepared; but has not yet been presented to the Parliament. The text of this legislation, offering effective protection against discrimination, has been prepared by the Institute for Comparative Law. An expert committee of the Council of Europe has given a positive opinion on the draft; but the institutional initiative for presenting it to the Parliament is still lacking.

One paragraph in the Law on the Systemic Foundations of Education (2003, article 46.) deals with the prevention of discrimination in education., however, data on the frequency and effectiveness of its implementation are not available.

### **Civil Society**

#### **Structure of Roma community – traditional, civil and political**

There are almost 300 registered associations of citizens in Serbia engaged in Roma issues. However, most of these organizations are not actively involved, but only registered. There are two types of associations of citizens in the Roma community: (i) traditional *cultural and artistic associations* - organizations that are based on Roma ethnicity, which have been in existence from the 1930s: and (ii) *expert project-oriented organizations*. During the 90s, in parallel with the development of the NGO sector, and supported mainly by the Open Society Institute, a number of the cultural and artistic associations began project activities aiming to solve problems of Roma. At the same time, expert non-government organizations started to function, , aiming at dealing with Roma issues on project level. About 30 such expert project-oriented organizations that deal with Roma issues have been developed so far.

As the most important Roma political organization, the National Council of the Roma National Minority was founded in 2003, based on the provision in the *Federal Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities*. Members were elected by the legally set electors. This body represents the Roma community and participates in making decisions concerning use of language and alphabet, education, information and culture. It has 35 members, a President, 3 Vice Presidents, an executive committee of 6 members and a President as well, and committees for education, housing, culture, social and health care, political participation, NGO network, employment, IDPs and returnees. The mandate of the current composition is for 4 years (until June 2007) but re-election

might happen earlier. Recently a Council for Integration of Roma has been established also on the Vojvodina Government level.

### **Roma initiative and overall situation of the Roma community**

During 1990 a large number of pilot projects were developed, the experiences of which served to start more systematic planning. The Ministry for Human and Minority Rights launched some of the first systemic activities by supporting the development of a draft strategy for integration and empowerment of Roma, with the active involvement of non-governmental organizations dealing with Roma issues. Afterwards, non-government organizations and the National Council of the Roma National Minority were involved in the creation of the Action Plans for the Roma Decade, which the Government of Serbia adopted on 27 January 2005. However, no systemic activities have yet started.

In 2005, based on the initiative and support by the Minority Rights Center, a non-government organization that deals with Roma issues, three expert boards on issues of education, employment and health care of Roma were formed, with the aim to monitor and support activities of state institutions in the implementation of the Decade Action Plans for Roma. These boards consist of 22 representatives of non-governmental organizations. In October 2005 as a result of the work of these boards, a League for the Decade was formed to contribute to the realization and efficient implementation of the Action Plans in the areas of education, employment, health care and housing. The League was founded by the Fund for Open Society Serbia, Minority Rights Center, Children Roma Center, Civil Initiatives, Yugoslav Association for Culture and Education of Roma, Yurom Center and National Council of Roma National Minority.

### **Other key actors in civil society and relations to Roma**

During the 90's, in the context of the dissolution of ex-Yugoslavia and the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, a vibrant civil society emerged in Serbia, mostly in opposition to the Serbian Government and its policy during the 90's. Priority areas of the civil society during the Milosevic-era were clearly related to internal political disputes, to combating nationalism and xenophobia addressed towards the other nations of ex-Yugoslavia, and to assisting in accommodating the influx of refugees. At that time, the engagement of civil society focused on human rights, anti-war, peace and conflict resolution, and on education for democracy. Roma related issues were in the shadow of the drama of the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, and were rarely addressed. Only after 2000, in parallel with the emergence of the Roma NGO sector, did human rights, humanitarian, peace, and refugee focused NGOs turn their attention towards Roma issues.

Currently, a considerable part of the civil society is addressing discrimination against Roma, assisting the education integration of Roma, and providing humanitarian and legal assistance to Roma refugees and IDPs.

### **3. Education System**

#### **Governance Structure**

The education system is governed by the Ministry of Education and Sports and by the Provincial Secretariat for Education of Vojvodina, to which a part of management and governance tasks have been delegated from 2002. In addition to this, there are 2 recently set up background institutions (Institute for the Development of Education and the Institute for Evaluation) with responsibilities for education development set by Law (2003 and 2004), and one background institution for Vojvodina – the Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina. The central background institutions do not have departments or advisors for minority or Roma education, but the Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina has as its main task the development of minority education, including Roma, and often this institution takes up a coordinating role involving National Minority Councils. According to the 2004 Law a main strategic body, with responsibilities for setting curricula and standards in all important respects, should be the National Council for Education (with one representative selected jointly by all national minorities). However, this body has not yet been set up.

The internal organisation in the Ministry is by education levels, headed by Deputy or Assistant Ministers. There is also a Section for Education Development and Int'l Cooperation, and for Finances. The MoES has 13 regional administrative units (School Authorities), and each municipality has a small unit covering education related issues. The MOES employs only one Roma advisor, at the central office..

A decentralisation process has started after 2001 by strengthening the pedagogic, administrative and financial autonomy of schools (school boards are comprised of 3 parents, 3 teachers and 3 municipal representatives, having the mandate to appoint school principals), and the responsibility of municipalities to provide legal inspection, determine the network of schools for compulsory education, and finance maintenance, investment, and teacher training costs. However, these decentralization initiatives still lack both a clear concept and concrete implementation. The regional school authorities are only detached units of the Central Government, and the municipal units lack capacity. Also, municipal and regional level planning is not yet mandated, although several municipalities have developed local development plans, some of them encompassing also a Roma education component.

Political discussions regarding decentralisation of education seem to have recently re-started, focusing primarily on financing and school rationalisation.

#### **Financing**

Schooling in public schools is free of charge by law, including a 4 hours preschool provision during the last preschool year. Salaries and investments are funded from the national budget based on the number of eligible classes and teachers (not on per student basis); investment, maintenance, school supplies, refurbishment and teacher training costs are met from local revenues. More than 80% of the budget for education is covering the salaries. However, parents are covering the costs of textbook purchase and of other school supplies for their children, lunches, snacks, extracurricular activities are also paid by the parents, and often parental contributions are requested for supporting school refurbishment. Private tutoring is a widespread practice, especially in towns and

cities, and it is paid by parents who can afford. About 30% of secondary school students resort to private tutoring and 10% at primary level also. In addition to these expenses, supplementary exams are also charged and students enrolled as "non-regular students" (an option at secondary level) are charged tuition fees. Tertiary education is nominally free of charge, although universities are allowed to expand student intake above the state funded limit and charge tuition fees to the students from the expanded list, a practice which most faculties follow.

At all levels gross inefficiencies can be detected. These include low and unevenly distributed teacher student ratios, including small rural schools which have even inverse teacher-student ratios, secondary VET schools for unemployable professions, an overdeveloped network of special schools, low teaching loads of 18-20 instruction hours per week, etc. In order to cope with inefficiencies and lack of reliable and up to date data on the education system, the development of a comprehensive Education Management Information System has started in 2002, covering finances, facilities, staff, students and some basic quality indicators. In 2003 the preparations for the per student financing formula started. Both were slowed down due to political changes in 2004, however, the EMIS is expected to become fully functional by end of 2006, and the formula financing discussions seem to be on the agenda soon.<sup>4</sup>

Saving from reducing the systemic inefficiencies could cover the costs of full Roma participation in public education.

### **Facilities**

School and preschool facilities are still state owned. The network of schools is adapted to the demographic situation of the 60's and 70's. Buildings are currently often dilapidated, lack modern equipment, and are oversized in the rural and city-center areas, while lacking space in suburban areas, where very often Roma settlements are located as well. Schooling most often is organised in two shifts, allowing neither time nor space for significant extracurricular activities nor additional classes for students in need. Demographic decline in Serbia has affected the school system only in recent years, due to a population increase during the 90's through the influx of about 800.000 refugees. Rationalisation of the school network is due in the near future, and the discussion on transfer of ownership of facilities to municipalities has started recently.

### **Language of instruction**

The language of instruction is Serbian, but in areas where national minorities live it can be also the language of the national minority at all education levels, based on request and availability of teaching staff. Hence, at pre-primary, primary and secondary level (and partially also on tertiary level) complete instruction is provided in Albanian, Hungarian, Slovakian, Romanian, Ruthenian, Croatian, and optional instruction of mother tongue is provided in Bulgarian and Romani in a number of primary schools. Roma students are most often enrolled in schools where the language of instruction is Serbian, but in Vojvodina they are also attending Hungarian and Slovak instruction schools.

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<sup>4</sup> Strategy of the Ministry of Education and Sports 2005-2010 ( [www.mps.sr.gov.yu](http://www.mps.sr.gov.yu))

### **Education cycles, progression criteria and examination system**

Currently, education is provided in 4 cycles (pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary level). Pre-primary education is voluntary, but from 2006 autumn a compulsory pre-school year is to be introduced. Education is compulsory until the age of 16. Primary (1-8 grades) education is comprehensive, organised as class-instruction in grades 1-4, and as subject instruction afterwards. The transition from 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade is sharp, both in respect of curriculum requirements and teachers' attitudes. These changes often result in a negative schooling experience for students. This coincides with the age when the dropout rate for Roma students increases dramatically.

Selection based on achievement is introduced at enrolment to secondary and to tertiary education. Distinction between academic and vocational education starts after compulsory education, at the secondary level. About 90% of the cohort finishing compulsory education enters secondary education, and about 25% finishing secondary continues with tertiary education. However, drop-out rates at all levels are significant, they are higher at the higher levels of education, and are higher among the rural population, children of low SES parents, the Roma population, and girls.

Currently there are no external school leaving examinations. Enrolment exams with a combination of school mark averages are set for entry into secondary and tertiary education. Capacity building and other preparation for introducing school leaving examinations started in 2002, however currently it is not clear when implementation would start.

### **Special schools**

There is an overdeveloped network of primary education special schools (almost every 2<sup>nd</sup> municipality has such a school) catering children with learning disabilities and other special needs, and also regular primary schools can have special classes for the same purpose. Instruction in these schools and classes is in smaller class size, they use reduced curricula, have special education teachers and do not offer re-entry into the regular system. Enrolment is based on referral from a municipal level "categorisation committee", children get hot meals, free textbooks, and are eligible for a small subsidy for social care. Due to biased categorisation and the social benefits attached to special education, Roma children are overrepresented in these schools (in some even 80% of students are Roma), hence special schooling became a way of segregation in Serbia.

### **Social support for students**

Student loans and scholarships are provided from the national budget, for both secondary and tertiary students. The amounts for both are low, around 50 Euro monthly, tailored to cover the costs of accommodation in student dormitories with a 20% surplus for other expenses. Scholarships are merit based (the financial status of the students' family is contributing to the selection criteria only with 5%), hence Roma students usually do not qualify for them. Loans are offered for vocational schools preparing for professions in which there is a serious shortage of labor, selected by the employment services. Yearly about 11.000 scholarships and 2-300 loans are disbursed for secondary school students, covering about 3.5% of the total number of students at secondary level. A new law on students' standard has been prepared and is under discussion, however, affirmative action and social needs based scholarships are not foreseen in the draft.

On the other hand, social assistance for families eligible for this benefit is conditional upon the enrolment of their school-aged children in school, proved by a certificate from the school, submitted by the parent to the social services office on a regular basis. Although this could be a useful motivating mechanism, there is plenty of anecdotal experience of how it is violated in practice.

### **Key legislation**

Education is regulated by an umbrella law on the system of education (from 2003, with amendments in 2004), a set of laws for each respective cycle of education (from which only the law on higher education is of a recent date), and an abundance of sub-legal acts, or Rulebooks. In addition to this an omnibus act is setting the responsibilities of Vojvodina in respect of education as well, and the Law on Minority Rights is regulating the responsibilities of National Minority Councils, also in respect of education.

Currently a new Law on Preschool education is under discussion (prepared in 2005 Autumn). Roma organisations have already reacted, since it does not capture provisions of affirmative action, is not incorporating preschool related elements of the Decade Action Plan on Education (Roma teaching assistants, 2 years free of charge preschool for Roma children, etc.), and does not ensure mechanisms for a significantly higher enrolment of Roma children, hence there is a real concern that the implementation of the new Law can easily contribute to an additional exclusion of Roma children.

A new Law on textbook publishing has been prepared in 2004/05 but not yet discussed. Also a new Law on students' standards is prepared for the Parliament, but this legislation also does not foresee increased level of support to students coming from socially and economically deprived backgrounds. The revision of the legislative acts regulating other education cycles (Primary, Secondary, VET) will be due soon as well.

**Status of the education system**

	Pre-primary	Primary school (G1-G8)	Secondary	Tertiary 2000/2001
Staff**	8715	44791	26231	
No of students**		667570	302612	
No. of children in one cohort**	85.000 (approx)	85.000 (approx)	85.000 (approx)	
No. institutions**	1 per municipality	3587 (including branch schools)	490	5 Universities 22 Tertiary
pupil-teacher ratio*	14 (2000/2001)	20 (2000/2001)	14 (2000/2001)	18 (2000/2001)
graduation rate				
Gross enrolment ratios*(%) <sup>5</sup> (2000/2001)	44%	98%	89%	36%
Net enrolment ratios* (%) (2000/2001)	43%	96%		
% of Public expenditure on education* (2002/2003)	12%	46%	23%	19%

\* Source: UNESCO statistics  
[http://stats.uis.unesco.org/ReportFolders/ReportFolders.aspx?CS\\_referer=&CS\\_ChosenLang=en](http://stats.uis.unesco.org/ReportFolders/ReportFolders.aspx?CS_referer=&CS_ChosenLang=en)

\*\* Source: MOES statistics, 2004

<sup>5</sup> Percentages of children in school are represented by Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratios (NER). GER is the number of pupils enrolled in a given level of education regardless of age expressed as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group for that level of education. NER is the number of pupils in the theoretical age group who are enrolled expressed as a percentage of the same population.

Education as of % of GDP: 3,4 for 2004
Literacy rate* 15+: 96.4%

### Education indicators of Roma students in Serbia\*\*\*:

Proportion of Roma attending preschool education among the 3 to 5 year olds	1%
Proportion of Roma enrolling in 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	82,5%- 89,6%
Proportion of school-aged Roma in school	can be as low as 20% (estimate based on recent MOES data)
Proportion of Roma children not continuing primary education beyond the 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	50%
Proportion of Roma children not completing 8 (9) years of primary education	62,7% -78,8%
Proportion of the Roma children who are enrolled in special education schools and classes	12% of Roma enrolled in education are in special school/class
Dropout rate of Roma between 1 <sup>st</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> (9 <sup>th</sup> ) grade	49%-52%
Proportion of Roma continuing at secondary level	8,3%
Proportion of Roma completing vocational education and training	6,2%
Enrollment rate for Roma in vocational education and training	8,1%
Tertiary level enrollment	0,9%

\*\*\* Source: Needs Assessment Study, 2004

### Extent and nature of Roma segregation and enrolment barriers

The most pertinent problem is very low enrolment and very high dropout rate of the Roma children, compounded by their misplacement in special schools and classes.

Roma in Serbia face a whole set of administrative barriers to their education, falling into the following categories:

1. Serious enrolment barriers exist for Roma enrolment into preschool and primary education:
  - Non-compulsory preschool education is partly municipality subsidized, partly paid by parents, and in case of lack of space, priority for enrolment is given to children whose parents are both employed. Hence the Roma, even if they could pay the attendance fee, most often do not meet this requirement, and given the usual lack of space cannot enrol in preschool, except to the 4 hours preparatory program.
  - Enrolment into primary education (as well as the preparatory preschool) is based on a residence permit to the neighbourhood school. Many Roma living in settlements do not have a residence permit since settlements are not officially

- registered, and the neighbourhood school (or any other school) is not obliged to enrol them. Schools are not yet facing dramatic population decline and are not financed on per capita student basis, hence their interest to enrol “extra students” is not high. The development of a per capita financing with higher coefficients for minority children started in 2002, but is still not being fully developed nor implemented. Actions involving the Ministry of Interior Affairs to overcome the registration barrier have started in 2005.
- The same problem is present in an even more serious form for the several tens of thousands of Roma internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kosovo, and the Roma returnees (again several tens of thousands), who are in significant number of cases without residence permits and a high percentage of Roma children born during the wars in the 90’s, due to frequent migrations, face additional problems regarding their birth certificates. In most cases they do not speak the languages in which instruction is organised in Serbia.
  - Enrolment into primary education is conditional on a medical check-up and assessment of school-readiness. Since unemployed and unregistered Roma face difficulties in access to health care, organising the medical check-up is often an additional barrier for them. The assessment of school readiness is conducted in those languages in which complete instruction is offered and requires paper and pencil familiarity and other mainstream culture-based competencies. Roma children often show low results and are encouraged to enrol in special schools. Abolishing this requirement started in 2002, but this initiative was not followed up after 2004. The Decade Action Plan for Health includes actions to overcome access barriers to health care but implementation is still lacking.
  - There is no systemic provision for mastering the languages required for instruction in the education system in Serbia – which affects Roma who speak Romani, or EU languages at mother-tongue level as returnees, or who speak Albanian but live in areas where schooling in Albanian is not provided (Albanian instruction is provided only in Southern Serbia)
2. There is a systemic gap in the education provision affecting Roma. Enrolment into primary education is age-bound: until the age of 8,5 children are eligible for late enrolment into 1<sup>st</sup> grade, after that their appropriate grade placement is appraised by an ad hoc committee set up by the school, and after the age of 16 they are eligible for enrolment into adult education schools. Many Roma children fall into the gap between 8,5 and 16 years, and the ad hoc committees are neither functional nor interested in extra intake of students which will require additional staff time (and generate no revenue). Since there is no regular legal and financial ground for organising schooling in this age period, these children are left out completely. Currently there is no government strategy to overcome this problem, and only some schools are offering assistance in a semi-legal way.
  3. After dropping out from education (both primary or secondary), there is no legal entry back into the system. The only possibilities available for those who have dropped out are the following:
    - After dropping out from primary school the only possibility is enrolment into adult education primary schools after the age of 16, at the first next grade

level. Currently this education does not provide qualification certificates other than graduation from adult education primary school.

- After dropping out from secondary education, only vocational training organised by the National Employment Services, which does not provide nation-wide professional certificates is available, usually with attached fees.
4. Entrance to secondary and tertiary education is competitive, based on grade averages and enrolment exams, the preparation mostly involves private tutoring, hence Roma students most often end up in non-attractive, non-competitive schools offering education for non-employable professions, or abandon further schooling altogether. Entrance to tertiary education is conditional on graduation from a 4 year secondary school, and is competitive for the students whose tuition fee is covered by the national budget, based on and an entry exam. Intake of self-financing students is less competitive, but tuition fees are high. The National Council of the Roma National Minority usually succeeds to enrol additional students into the list covered by the budget based on affirmative action; however, there is no systemic provision yet aside from lobbying<sup>6</sup>.

To sum up, Roma in Serbia face a daunting set of enrolment barriers to education, consequently their participation in education is one of the lowest in South East Europe. Due to low attendance, segregated education in the system is not yet a major issue, except in rare un-systemic cases, and in special schools, mainly composed of Roma students. However, as there currently is no legal anti-segregation document, it is expected that this issue will surface immediately after resolving some of the enrolment barriers, and needs to be mitigated in advance.

### **Qualitative assessment of the status of the education system :**

The education system in Serbia is in transformation from 2001 onwards, facing all the typical ups and downs, back-and-forths of a prolonged transition process. As a result of this, developments are under way in almost all areas of the system, some more advanced and completed more quickly, some others facing sustained barriers. For a detailed qualitative assessment see Table in Annex 1.

*School management* and governance has changed involving parents and municipality representatives into school boards ( composition 3 parents, 3 teachers, 3 municipal officials), but political tensions around school principal appointments still are a fact in many cases, and the role of parents and students is in practice often just decorative. Neighbourhood schooling principle dominates, and free choice of schools is possible but complicated. Since there is a high violence rate among children and youth, Ministry

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<sup>6</sup> In cooperation of the MoHMR, MoES and NCRNM in school years 2003/04, 2004/5 and 2005/06 affirmative action measures for enrolment in secondary schools and on universities were implemented. Legal bases for this were the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities (Art. 4.) and Framework Convention on Protection of National Minorities (Art.4). Since AA measures are not precisely defined in the area of education - criteria, methodology and scope of these actions were subjects of negotiations between these institutions every year.

programs are addressing this problem. Also, school development planning is increasingly becoming a common practice..

*Teachers* (qualification, selection, education and training): for teachers a University degree is required, and an induction period and state exam after 1-2 years of practice. No competencies and standards are yet set for the teaching profession, their initial education is in serious need for renewal, but their licencing and career advancement is newly regulated. Also a new teacher in-service training system has been set up, is mandatory, TT programs are accredited by a Professional Development Department of a new Institute, good selection of teacher training is offered, and funded from municipal or national budget. However, it has not yet reached all teachers, and teachers competency in dealing with modern pedagogical issues is generally low.

*Curriculum:* the curriculum is set on the national level, it is content based and factual, developed and approved by Ministry, and only small level school flexibility is allowed. New curriculum approaches have been tried out recently, but have been abandoned after Government changes..

*Textbooks:* All subjects are covered by textbooks, purchased by parents, and a new accreditation system for textbooks is under development.

*Assessment and evaluation:* The development of a school leaving examination system is under way. Traditional inspection is still the dominating evaluation mechanism, it is set on Municipal and national level, but school self-evaluation has also started in select schools. Formative assessment is not yet a practice in Serbia, except in 1<sup>st</sup> grade primary, summary assessment is the practice, and it is not regulated in a way which would eliminate teacher bias

*Finances:* education provision is covered from national (salaries and investment which constitute 80% of the total) and municipal budgets, salaries are based on number of eligible teachers in each school (calculated from number of eligible classes and program requirements). Per student formula financing is planned, but not yet prepared or implemented.

### **Summary of systemic strengths and weaknesses w.r.t. Roma education**

Roma children enrolled in schools in Serbia are facing systemic multi-layered barriers in their education, which are acting as incentives for dropout. These are:

1. Management and school ethos generally not welcoming Roma children. School management is not trained and not supported for inclusive education, school management and non-Roma parents are not cooperative towards Roma parents, Roma parents are not involved in school-boards, discrimination at school level is not regularly inspected.

However, there are schools (about 10% of total schools) which are implementing their school development plans (or actively seeking for grants for implementation) aiming for inclusive programs addressing the needs of Roma children in a non-discriminatory way.

2. Roma children are most often not accepted, not motivated, not supported by teachers: there are almost no Roma qualified teachers as university graduates, teachers generally lack teaching skills to manage multicultural classes, to motivate children from different backgrounds, to conduct interactive & cooperative instruction. There is a lack of qualified teachers in suburban and rural schools with a higher percentage of Roma pupils, and there is no system (nor legal provision for it currently) of Roma teaching assistants or mediators, except of a few pilot cases. There is frequent teachers' bias and low expectation regarding Roma students. Roma teaching assistants are not a common practice. However, teacher training programs are accredited, attendance of programs stimulated, and at least 10% of the accredited programs aim to develop teachers' competencies which are needed for effective instruction in multicultural classes.

3. Roma children lack support in mastering a non-inviting curriculum: the curriculum is demanding in terms of factuality and in terms of prerequisite skills and knowledge, it is lacking school-based flexibility and is detached from everyday experiences of Roma children. Also, there is no institutional provision for attaining language skills necessary for following the instruction for Roma who are speaking Romani or Roma returnees from EU countries speaking other languages, and the legal provision of organizing additional classes for students in need is neither systematically enforced nor quality controlled.

4. Roma children either don't have textbooks or lack support in using them: textbooks are usually paid by parents and there is no legally set system of free textbook provision for Roma children other than ad hoc actions, textbooks are not presenting Roma culture, are not conducive for independent learning, and Roma children lack parental support to use textbooks.

5. Roma children usually become underachievers at education tests/exams and are prevented in participation in further education, since the assessment system is comprised of culturally and linguistically biased enrollment testing and competitive school entrance examinations, where no systemic support for Roma children is provided. In-class assessment is also competitive, no formative or descriptive assessment is practiced. Also, the municipal and national inspection system is mostly not accessible for the Roma: inspectors are not trained to detect discrimination or exclusion through regular school visits, and parents' grievances are expected to be submitted in written form.

6. Roma education is not financed appropriately: financing schemes are not conducive for inclusive education, are not adjusting to demographic developments, schools in poor municipalities where Roma live are unable to cover basic education costs, preschool education is not free of charge, free school meals are not provided, additional classes are not provided, financial incentives are allocated to special education and the education and social welfare financing schemes are separated.

#### **4. Background and overview of REF Activities**

Prior to the establishment of REF, serious preparation for Roma integration had already started in Serbia. After the adoption of the Law establishing the National Councils as organisational structures mandated with a clear role, late 2002 the OSCE has supported the development of a Strategy for the integration and empowerment of Roma, covering education, health, employment and housing, but also political participation, social care, culture and media and the status of women, as well as refugees, IDPs and readmittees. Built on the same momentum, with the support of the Fund for Open Society Serbia, a special Strategy of the Ministry of Education and Sports for the improvement of Roma education has been also developed. The Decade action plans were hence based both on the Decade activities and support, but also on the already completed Strategies. 2004 the Needs Assessment for Roma education was conducted, summing up the experiences of a variety of pilot programs launched in the previous period as well as research results, statistical data from surveys, census and Ministry sources. Data from the needs assessment are still reference data, since no data collection system has been established since. On the other hand, the Needs assessment study was conducted at a very turbulent period in regards of education (change of Government and subsequent changes of Ministers, senior officials and ministry staff; major legislative and policy changes), hence the legislative and policy related aspects of the needs assessment study are less relevant today.

The Decade Action Plan for Education reflects the major conclusions and recommendations of the Needs Assessment. It has been developed with great care by a working group consisting of NGO representatives and professionals, and with MoES input, and is a very detailed plan, comprising all possible actions needed to be taken. However, it does not set indicators or targets in terms of expected enrolment, dropout or achievement of Roma students.

##### **Commitments to Roma Decade, Actions/progress to date**

On political level, there is a strong commitment to the Decade from the side of the Prime Minister and the Minister for Human and Minority Rights. The Action Plans without budget were officially adopted and endorsed by the Government. Subsequently, the Roma Secretariat coordinated the process of budgeting the Action Plans in cooperation with the responsible line Ministries and the Ministry of Finance. The 2006 national budget reflects part of the Action Plan budgets, as close to the requested level for education, but as much less for the other action plans, especially housing. Parts of the action plan on education are also incorporated in the Ministry's Strategy for 2005-2010.

Progress to date is not yet visible on *legislative level*. The most important new initiative for legislative change is addressing civil registration, a prerequisite for enrolment in education. Its current form is tying civil registration to residence permits based on eligible housing conditions, which is not suitable for the large majority of the socially endangered Roma population. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights took up the responsibility to address this issue as a violation of basic human rights, an inter-ministerial working group has been formed late 2005 and an action plan, encompassing legislative changes for civil registration has been drafted until now.

On *program level* more coherent and coordinated activities for the implementation of the DAP are planned by the MOES and the Roma Secretariat in 2006. Currently the most visible actions are the following:

- The National Council for the Roma National Minority in cooperation with the MoES and MoHMR is organising the enrolment of Roma students into secondary and tertiary schools based on affirmative action, as well as providing textbook packages for Roma primary education students. This is planned to be followed up by development of legal regulations and a guidebook, in cooperation of EAR, OSCE and the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights
- Several municipalities have in cooperation with different Ministries or Int'l organizations developed local action plans for Roma integration based on the DAP (e.g.. Ada, Kanjiža, Paraćin, Pirot, Niš, Kragujevac, Valjevo, Subotica, Sombor started) with some funds set aside for its implementation. This line of action is planned to expand further in the future
- Schools received instructions from the MoES on how to avoid the potential dangers of forming segregated classes
- Initiatives of organising Chairs for Romology, and for introducing curricula supporting inclusive education at Teachers faculties have started
- A new program for the subject Roma language and culture has been developed for Grades 1-4 primary, textbook of Roma Grammar, two readers of Roma literature for 1-2 grade of primary, and an Ethno-historical guidebook of national minorities have been developed recently
- Also, about 20 Roma NGOs are currently running education related projects, mostly started around 2003, and mostly addressing preschool and primary education needs through organising alternative and supplementary education provision in Roma settlements.

### **Donor funding: In-country programs**

There are several donor funded programs in Roma education in Serbia. International organisations have their programs, but also bilateral donors are supporting projects, mostly from the NGO sector. The Roma Secretariat in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights has started data collection on Roma projects. According to their information base, currently international organisations are funding the following activities addressing the education of Roma:

- UNICEF: gives support to the development of local action plans for Roma inclusion in 4 municipalities, support to Roma Education Centers, and training of preschool teachers, all in Southern Serbia; is finalising a regional study on social exclusion of children; and plans to support Roma women networks in engagement for education, strengthening parent competencies, teacher training, and expanding support to the development of local action plans for Roma inclusion.
- Save the Children UK: is running a Program for inclusive education of Roma children in the framework of a 3-years regional project "Inclusive education

- combating discrimination in the Western Balkans: Equal chances for Roma children”.
- International Red Cross is organising preschool provision for mostly Roma children in about 30 settlements, in cooperation with a variety of bi-lateral donors and the Serbian Red Cross
  - Fund for Open Society Serbia: support is currently mostly targeting the activities of the League for the Decade, a 3-years project “Equal chances in secondary education”(co-funded with the Pestalozzi Foundation), the continuation of Step by step preschools, and the promotion of inclusive education. Also FOSS is participating in several publications and reports on Roma.
  - SDC: is funding several international projects (UNICEF, Red Cross), and cooperating also with the MoES on teacher training provision at 3 regional teacher training centers
  - EAR and OSCE are supporting municipal Roma coordinators, of potential relevance also for Roma Education.
  - In addition to this, several Embassies are using small grant schemes to support Roma NGOs, some of which are engaged in education projects as well. However, a clear picture on this is not available.
  - European Agency for Reconstruction in cooperation with the OSCE is in preparation for starting a program for institutionalising the role of Roma Teaching Assistants in the preschool education system, including their training

Although the total investment in Roma education by the listed donors most probably does not exceed 1 mil Euro yearly, from REF perspective these donor activities are important, and call for participation in in-country donor coordination activities in addition to those conducted from the home office.

#### **Donor funding: conditions and constraints**

Serbia benefits from a high level of donor support from the EU and other international and bilateral partners. While much of this support has been geared to restarting the economy following the economic implosion of the 1990s, increasing attention is being paid to poverty and human development issues. This is reflected in the designation of funds allocated to Serbia by many of the bilateral donors to the REF. Overall donor coordination in Serbia could contribute more to social issues including Roma education .

#### **Key contacts and partners**

The REF has developed and is relying on a network of key contacts in Serbia, comprised of:

- National coordinator for the Decade of Roma Inclusion: Jelena Markovic, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Deputy Minister
- Leadership of the National Council for the Roma National Minority: Ljuan Koka and Vitomir Mihajlovic
- Director of the Center for Minority Rights: Petar Antic; other Roma NGOs incl.in the League for the Decade and in the development of the Action Plan for Education
- Head of the Roma Secretariat in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights: Anne- Maria Cukovic

- OSCE and OSI staff responsible for Roma programs (Zeljko Jovanovic and Jadranka Stojanovic)
- Ministry of Education and Sports: Slobodan Vuksanovic (Minister), Bogoljub Lazarevic (Deputy Minister for Secondary Education), Milka Andric (Deputy Minister for Primary and Preschool Education)
- Vojvodina Secretariat for Education: Danica Stefanovic and Svetlana Vujovic, Deputy Secretaries
- Secretary of the Council for National Minorities: Petar Ladjevic
- Poverty Reduction Office: Aleksandra Jovic

### **Project approvals and pipeline**

Until February 2006 REF received 14 project proposals from Serbia, 2 (and a part of one more project) have been approved during autumn 2005, and 2 in March 2006, 3 are rejected, and 6 are in the pipeline, in the process of upgrading. Total commitments approved up to date are 726.000 euro, which leaves approximately the same amount to commit for new projects during 2006.

The approved projects are aiming at visible policy changes, in the following areas:

- Inclusion of Roma children in pre-school education 1 year before compulsory enrolment age
- Development and provision of a new model for finishing primary school and gaining first vocational certificate for Roma second-chance education
- Piloting the inclusion of Roma parents in school boards and school councils
- Developing a regional Roma integration action plan. However, both are pilot projects, which in case of success will need further support for scaling up.

Implementation progress up to date is in accordance with the submitted and approved implementation plans. First formal 3-monthly reports have been submitted early April 2006.

### **Project partnerships**

REF projects up to March, 2006 typically have partnership arrangements between Roma organisations and Government structures, in the following combinations:

Roma organisation and Government (National or Local): 3

Roma organisation, non-Roma professional organisation and Government: 2

The partnerships are also reflected in co-financing the project, in some cases substantially, in others only symbolically. These partnership arrangements can have an added value in establishing meaningful working cooperation between the Roma and non-Roma community in Serbia.

However, REF has not yet entered into partnership arrangements with other donors, nor has it received projects from Roma NGO coalitions, which would be very welcome.

### **Dialogue with Authorities**

The Dialogue with the Serbian Authorities regarding approved projects has been carried out efficiently by the National Council for the Roma National Minority, REF intervention was relevant only at select key meetings with the Ministry leadership.

Already in 2006, when expected policy changes based on project work and based on the Education Action Plan start coming due, the REF will need to adopt a more active role.

## 5. REF Strategy

### Country specific constraints

#### *Knowledge and data gaps:*

1. *Regular data collection and processing* is a key, currently still missing link for appropriate targeting of REF actions, as well as for monitoring their effectiveness. This is evident both on the level of the governmental data collection systems and on the level of the data pertinent to the Roma population:
  - a) Governmental data collection systems for education, the Education Management Information System is in the process of being set up (it is expected to become fully functional by the end of 2006), and hence other data collection is currently not happening in any systematic way. Also, data collection for Country Education Indicators is expected to be the role of the newly established Institute for evaluation, which is in restructuring and still without clarity in respect of which achievement indicators will be collected for which age groups. Once both of these institutional arrangements are clearly set, negotiations in respect of indicators monitoring the education status of Roma should start.
  - b) in respect of data in the Roma community itself, in addition to the common problems in data collection throughout the region, Serbian Roma (as well as those in Montenegro) are facing additional uncertainties due to lack of documentation for Roma IDPs and Roma returnees. In case the Government action on identification documents and civil registration gets fully implemented, it is expected that data gaps regarding Roma will visibly decrease.
2. Although a great number of Roma NGOs is engaged in the field of education in Serbia, there is an outstanding lack of *Roma teacher and /education professionals* who could be the driving force of sustained and thoughtful actions for the improvement of the education of the Roma. The Roma community currently has a very active role in demanding better education services, and it is well organised through NGO networks and the National Council for the Roma National Minority, with its regional offices and municipal coordinators in the process of being set up. However, as the implementation of the DAP and of the REF projects unfold, it is expected that a bottleneck could appear in terms of institutional capacities and human resources in the Roma community, unless new organisational, networking and capacity building structures emerge in the near future.

3. Certain additional constraints arise from the *late transition* Serbia is undergoing from the 2000s – which in the education sector is still very visible. Currently, the Serbian education system is framed through three trends: a) in its basic structural features it still preserves the characteristics of the pre – 1990’s education system of the ex-Yugoslavia; b) the consequences of the dramatic deterioration of the 90’s are still visible, when education faced a steeper decline in financing than the decrease of GDP (culminating in teachers salaries at the level of 1\$ per day), and underwent a massive centralisation process and becoming vulnerable to serious conservative, nationalistic and clerical impacts; and c) the complicated processes of change in the period after 2000, with education reform processes starting, , stopping, and restarting in several respects again. This makes negotiations with stakeholders complicated, and calls for very carefully planned REF actions, which neither underestimate the potentials for serious improvements, nor the potentials for unexpected barriers.

### **Institutional and other capacity issues**

1. The current lack of stable educational policy is hampering medium and long term strategic planning for the improvement of Roma education. However, this situation also creates certain opportunities for launching novel approaches, and addressing policy changes in nascendi, in cooperation with key policy makers.
2. Institutional capacities in Serbia are distributed in unusual ways, as a result of political pressures during the 90’s and turbulent policy changes in the 2000s. Hence, most professional capacities are still located in NGOs, emerging think tanks, and in some of the state institutes, rather than in the Government structures.
3. A major barrier to efficiently addressing education issues concerning the Roma is the lack of clear institutional responsibilities in this respect. The paths to decision-making responsibility are thus multiple and not coordinated. Any initiative calls for reaching the highest level in order to get access to a specially designated Deputy Minister and/or advisor, hence the initiative needs to be processed by those having access to this level, the National Council of the Roma National Minority, the Roma Secretariat of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, or the Vojvodina Secretariat for Minorities, i.e. bodies not specialised for education issues, and its further processing depends on the face-value assessment of the Minister or the Mayor, in case of local actions.
4. Donor coordination regarding Roma projects is a necessity but currently there is a lack of institutional resources and commitment for taking leadership in this respect.

### **Key Instruments and Priorities/Time Frame for Achieving Results**

Having in mind the multiple barriers to enrolment in education the Roma face and the multiple “incentives” for dropping out they have, as well as the social environment which is only partially conducive, REF commitment will be essential for the improvement of Roma education in the long term as well.

1. Current priority areas for larger-scale investments should focus on the following urgent and massive problems/issues:
  - Setting up the legal and institutional prerequisites, the support, and the Roma parent motivation needed for the education of 9-16 old Roma currently not catered by the education system (taking into account the need for establishing a

- system which will not increase the dropout rate from the regular system, and therefore have a temporary character)
- Urgent support for the inclusion of Roma children in the compulsory preschool program starting in September 2006.
  - Addressing the issue of overrepresentation of Roma in special schools, in cooperation with intergovernmental and international organisations, involving in-country professionals and Roma NGOs, to develop a clear and viable agenda for mainstreaming all children into an inclusive education system and abolishing or significantly decreasing the special education system. The upcoming economic and fiscal benefit study could be useful in convincing policy makers of the merit of this line of activity.
  - Supporting donor coordination of Roma education in the country
2. REF strategy addressing the needs of the Roma community support to education should focus on:
- Creating Roma professionals in education through a variety of venues
  - Supporting institutional developments and capacity building of the Roma community involved in education related activities, possibly also through supporting the establishment of a National Center for Roma Education, as foreseen by the DAP
  - Finding adequate mechanisms for complementing the lack of support system the Roma children need through: supporting Roma initiatives (by the National Council or Roma NGOs) increasing and supplementing for the active engagement of Roma parents in the education of their children – i.e. in motivating parents to enrol children on time, to ensure full-time attendance, to create time and space for homework, to monitor school achievements, prevent dropouts, etc.
  - Supporting initiatives and negotiating clear entries of Roma initiatives and grievances to the education system at national, regional, municipal and school levels, in order to overcome current bottlenecks
  - Contributing to the development of a cultural production which is mediating the successful coping with education experiences of the Roma students.
3. REF strategy in respect of Government initiatives and forthcoming education policy developments in the country:
- a) REF should build on already established new systems, ensuring their effectiveness in respect of the education of the Roma as well. These include the following:
- Compulsory preschool from age 6 – it is essential to ensure high percentage of Roma enrolment in this, partly through expanding a current project, and partly by supporting a good monitoring system of enrolment (either by NGOs or the municipal inspectorates)
  - The forthcoming reform of VET with modular instruction allowing easy re-entry into the system and gaining qualifications at a variety of levels – it is essential to ensure fair openings of new profiles eligible for Roma students as well (negotiations with the CARDS program leaders)

- In-service teacher training– it is essential to ensure that its provision includes quality programs to raise teachers’ sensitivity and impart the skills required for working in diversified classes (negotiations with the National Center responsible for teacher training accreditation), and that municipal finances are fairly distributed to cover teacher training in low income municipalities (negotiations with MoES and Ministry of Finance, cooperation with SDC)
  - School development planning now required from all schools and preschool institutions and school self-evaluation – it is essential to use this mechanism for supporting inclusive education (cooperate with WB project staff, and MOES regional departments supporting school development planning, support bottom up development of inclusive schools, cooperating with the Roma community and networking with each other, as well as cooperate with municipalities engaged in the development of their local action plans)
- b) REF should support current developments, ensuring Roma are not left out or jeopardized by them. These include the following:
- Development of the Education Management Information System – it is essential to be able to rely on the EMIS under development, regarding Roma relevant data as well (negotiations through the WB project leaders and consultants, and with MOES, including possible support for additional modules capturing pertinent issues related to the education of Roma)
  - Development of per student financing – it is essential to support this development and negotiate to ensure the adoption of an adequate financial coefficient for Roma students (through the WB project leaders and consultants) and to support an overall approach to fiscal decentralisation that assures adequate revenues to poorer local authorities with high Roma populations
  - The emerging policy in respect of civil registration should be supported, as well as the urgent abolishing of all enrolment barriers stemming from registration and ID gaps for Roma
  - Institutionalising Affirmative Action for Secondary and Tertiary education (cooperate with OSCE and Ministry of Human and Minority Rights in their action in this respect) and reviewing new legislation currently in preparation or in public discussion with a special view on its correspondence to the Decade Action Plans and affirmative action policies (e.g. draft Law on preschool education , draft Law on students’ standard)
  - Textbook accreditation, and establishment of school funds for textbooks could be also of interest for REF support
- c) REF should/could support projects initiating changes in the education system of pertinent importance for Roma. These are:
- Serbian as second language for Roma students
  - Enforcement of additional classes for students in need as a systemic, legally binding provision of the education system

- Involvement and active participation of municipal level school inspection on detecting, monitoring and preventing discrimination and segregation of Roma in the education system
  - Setting up a novel teacher education system ensuring new subject teachers' competencies in diversified classrooms
  - Abolishing the special education system
  - Curriculum development with increased school level flexibility, diversified content and teaching methods, clarification of expected outcomes coupled with formative assessment
- d) REF should monitor forthcoming changes with great risk in respect of Roma:
- School rationalisation and rationalisation of the teaching force if addressed without having in mind the educational needs of Roma children not yet in the system, or already dropped out, could easily cut down those opportunities and resources which the education system still has, and which could be used to the benefit of the education of the Roma. It will be important for REF to have a role and be able to leverage forthcoming changes in this respect, rather than to have to correct the mistakes already made. The districts catered by the neighbourhood school should be revised as well, in order to prevent the creation of segregated schools.
  - Setting up the school leaving examination system will be an additional challenge and potential barrier to Roma students, if not introduced in parallel to additional support systems for students not having the financial resources for private tutoring. REF should negotiate the establishment of such possibilities.

#### 4. REF strategy on research/TA

Although there are many data on Serbia, and several int'l organisations have conducted situation analyses and assessments on the education Roma in Serbia, there are specific missing links where focused research, tackling both situation analysis and policy recommendations is needed. These are the following:

- Transfer strategy from special schools to mainstream education

Given the fact that special education is de facto segregated Roma education in Serbia, there is a need for a targeted analysis of the scope of the problem, the mechanisms underlying the malpractice (including financial and other interests based mechanisms), as well as for an elaboration of possible strategies resulting in transferring children from special to regular education, and in not enrolling them in special education at the first place.

- Roma parent involvement possibilities specific to the Serbian context

Although there is a growing experience with parent involvement as an indispensable support mechanism for successful education of students through many Roma NGO projects, a clear overview of possible practices coupled with an assessment of their long term effectiveness, based on which sustainable approaches could be built is lacking.

- Legal regulation of enrolment of 9-16 year olds and setting up an effective system of education provision for late enrollers and children who dropped out

This area needs a study which should encompass an overview of useful practices from other countries, an assessment of the size and geographic distribution of children

affected, of legal impediments contributing to the problem and legislation in need to be revised, as well as possible scenarios for setting up a medium-term effective system operational only until the regular system starts to cater all Roma children,

- Curriculum development for teacher education universities pertinent for Roma students

In the process of the Bologna process of higher education reform teacher education universities will also change curricula, structures and procedures in the forthcoming 1-2 years. It is important that this process is informed by the needs which a more effective education of Roma (both children and students) should encompass. For this purpose a study is needed, addressing the overview of existing teacher education curricula from the perspective of multicultural education, barriers to introducing more effective curricula in this respect, possible options and recommendation, including also the overview of options for preparing students for teaching Romani language and culture. Since the higher education reform process is an international one, it would be best to conduct such a study for all decade countries in a coordinated way.

#### 5. REF communication strategy

REF related communication in Serbia will need to take into account the multiplicity of actors both in the field of education (ie. Decision making processes at national, Vojvodina and Municipal level) and in respect of Roma representation (civil society, State Union, Serbian and Vojvodina levels); current coordination gaps faced; and evident technological and language barriers with interested parties (access to internet, proficiency in English).

Since there is a reasonable interest in REF support from Serbia, an REF country launch for project generation purposes might not be needed. Rather, the first REF event should be organised with the purpose of sharing the experiences of the projects already funded, most probably early Autumn 2006.

Furthermore, the REF communication strategy in Serbia will need to address also additional aims, such as:

- Donor cooperation
- Coordination of Roma related activities
- Education coverage in public media

Priorities for activities listed under 1-3 will need to be set based on negotiations within REF, the donor community and with key national stakeholders, both from the Roma community and from the various layers of government. However, we see three major priority lines to be supported on a long-term basis as following:

1. Assisting in the abolishment of all enrolment barriers to education Roma are facing (including enrolment at preschool level).

Given the multiplicity of these barriers listed, and taking account the necessity of policy changes in order to circumvent and/or abolish them, REF will need to act in the following ways:

- support well targeted projects where Roma community – Government cooperation is established in meaningful and effective ways (including officials from the education sector but also from other areas where barriers are located, i.e. health, interior affairs, etc)
  - cooperate with other donors addressing similar issues and join forces
  - assist on policy level in a variety of modalities ( targeted consultancy based on request, supporting cooperation with other Decade countries where similar barriers have been abolished, participation in workshops, seminars, etc.)
2. Assisting in reducing the dropout rate of Roma from primary and secondary education

Since high dropout seems to be a joint result of several factors – lack of quality provision for Roma, poverty issues and a general parental support issue, REF will need to act in multiple ways:

- through targeted projects, cooperation with other partners, and through policy discussions ensure the regular and cost-effective provision of education support preventing Roma children from dropping out
- through reviewing existing scholarship schemes in the country, as well as the existing social assistance schemes, develop more effective and better targeted models which could ensure higher attendance and lower dropout, and assist policy makers to adopt and implement them
- support initiatives raising the quality of education provision for the Roma children in those areas which have been specially highlighted (teachers qualifications, curriculum flexibility, parent and student participation, etc.)

3. Capacity building of Roma in the field of education – as teachers, education policy designers, evaluators, researchers of education issues, etc.

REF will need to be very active in institutional development as well as human resources development involving prospective Roma educationalists

In the medium term, REF will need to focus additionally on two most burning issues:

1. focusing on education opportunities for the 9-16 old Roma currently not catered by the education system through new pilot projects
2. focusing on desegregation of Roma, segregated through the special schools system through new projects, policy dialogue and research.

### **Results framework – key results/indicators anticipated by REF activities**

Based on current projects, projects in pipeline, and the appraisal of availability of data (MOES plans, other donor funded projects' plans in education data collection), the set of expected results of REF activities should be visible on the following levels:

- Preschool attendance
- School attendance total and in regular vs. special classes/schools
- School absenteeism
- Achievement on math and language test compared to average
- Enrolment rate to secondary school
- Social integration or inclusion index of Roma students in school (3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade)

For the definition of potential indicators, current values, possible targets and data collection modalities please see Attachment 2.

In addition to these indicators it would be useful to add indicators of employability for Roma secondary students and indicators of the number of Roma professionals engaged in education. However, data collection for these indicators will call for other arrangements, not covered by those planned in the education sector.

It is expected that first results will be visible on the level of increased preschool attendance and enrolment to primary education, due to REF funded projects (for proxies see attachment 2), and on the level of increased enrolment in secondary and tertiary education as the result of Government actions in cooperation with the National Council of the Roma Minority.

### **Country monitoring framework**

The country monitoring framework needs to be set up as a matrix using data from the following sources:

1. the League for the Decade, and permanent monitoring by the Roma civil society
2. regular MOES statistics (EMIS ) and those collected by the Institute for Evaluation
3. REF project monitoring based on compliance to the outcomes and activities set in project Implementation plan 1 and 2 for each of the REF projects
4. The evaluation and monitoring designed and funded by each REF project
5. UNDP and UNICEF databases
6. special contracting of a professional agency for data collection in missing areas

Given knowledge and data gaps, and in order to develop a well functioning and efficient monitoring system it will be important to convene all actors listed under 1,2,3 and train them in a framework developed cooperatively by REF and the professional agency contracted, in the course of 2006.

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