

III

WORKSHOPS AND WORKING GROUP SESSIONS



- #1 Interactive Photography Workshop**
- #2 Developing Dialogue using Drama and Role-Play**
- #3 The Role of the Media in Advocating for Diversity and Promoting Responsible Reporting**

These workshops were activity rather than paper based.

#4 The Educational Needs of Children with Adult responsibilities

This discussion sought to consider the situation and needs of children who are absent from school because they are:

- Earning income for the household;
- Caring for other family members, usually younger siblings or looking after their own children;
- On the move; in that the parents are travelling, and the children travel with them.

Contributory factors to this phenomenon were discussed, including:

- Deep-rooted and widespread poverty;
- Lifestyle, particularly in Western Europe, where families are often travelling;
- Cultural traditions that mean that Roma girls are expected to marry and have children young, whilst boys are seen as “men” at a young age and therefore able to work;
- Discrimination against Roma in the workplace even where they have qualifications, making an education appear irrelevant;
- An unfavourable school environment, including inappropriate curricula, which makes the option of working or staying at home to look after other children more attractive.

Clearly, some of the factors that are preventing Roma children from attending school are “societal” (e.g. poverty) and can only be fully tackled by structural changes within society itself. Specific policy initiatives however that it was suggested should be carried out in tandem with wider societal change included those that are:

Child-focussed, e.g.:

- Evening/extra classes for children who have missed schooling, or who cannot attend during the day because of other commitments;
- Development of educational programmes for children who are absent for long periods through travelling/working seasonally, e.g. distance learning programmes, or use of log books to allow schooling at several different schools;

Parent-focussed, e.g.:

- Free child daycare so that young mothers can continue their education and older girls are not withdrawn from school to care for younger siblings;

- Grants made payable to parents to compensate for the time their children spend in school as opposed to working;

For education workers (teachers/policy-makers etc.) e.g.:

- Tackling bullying/mistreatment within school so that they present more friendly environments.
- Development of alternative/flexible curricula for Roma that are more inclusive/more appropriate for their needs;
- Appointment of education advisors within Ministries of Education specialising in Roma children's needs.

Again, in tandem with the above, the importance of greater communication between children, parents and teachers was stressed; to tackle education workers' prejudices about Roma and ensure that they are more supportive of Roma children's educational needs; to address parents' concerns about the lack of relevance of an education; and to encourage children to see education as useful.

#5 The Educational Needs of Refugee and Displaced Roma Children

The group examined and discussed:

- the situations in which displaced and refugee children were living
- existing standards of provision for them
- the specific factors and obstacles that made it difficult for these children to access education
- the tools that could be employed to lobby for improvements in provision (e.g. the UNCRC)

Problems and solutions were examined. Mainly, the discussions focussed on sharing experiences.

The problems included:

- multiple problems relating to language support needs
- discrimination and a lack of formal responses to incidents of discriminatory treatment in mainstream schools
- using the excuse of refugees not having their identity papers to refuse to enrol children in school is a particularly bad and often-cited example of this.

Solutions included:

- Ensuring there was support available to families by including incentives to get/keep children in school in poverty alleviation strategies
- Preventative work - to pre-empt problems arising that could lead to children not enrolling or dropping out, active involvement with families is needed to identify what these factors are

Examples of good practice

- using the goodwill of local NGOs and communities to help and cooperate with ministries
- in particular in assisting to develop inclusive and non-formal approaches that assist schools that are unused to having displaced and refugee pupils attending
- a systemic approach at policy level rather than a variety of ad-hoc initiatives of varying quality
- UNHCR scholarships

Issues:

- Complexity of problems e.g. returnees have missed out years of schooling in their 'home' systems
- Need for more research
- Diploma verification across countries
- Coping with trauma

#6 Policy Implications of the Roma Education Research Project IEP, OSI-BP. Beyond Projects: How can successful pilot initiatives and research inform policy development

This group discussed the issue of “scaling-up” good educational practice broadly, which was supported by an introduction to scaling up prepared by Peter Rado. The discussion then led to using concrete educational models and practice that have been evaluated for impact, and using those models to inform educational policy.

A “Draft Educational Policy Recommendations” paper, prepared by OSI, was discussed with the group in order to get feedback. Of particular interest to the authors of the paper, were to find out whether: The policy recommendations were relevant to their country, were written in realistic and understandable language, and whether such policies already exist in the countries present.

Below are some specific comments made during the Workshop:

- A positive aspect to the Recommendations paper is that research advocates policy which is based on practice that has been proven to be successful.
- The proposals, however, proved to be too broad and too much for any government to consider implementing at once. There is a need, therefore, to further refine recommendations into short, medium and long-term priorities.
- Only proposals and recommendations that are economically feasible for governments with tight budgets, will succeed.
- Language support was (an important issue) in projects, but not highlighted in the policy recommendations. This will have to be reconsidered when the paper is developed further.

Paper #1 - Scaling-up

System-wide implementation

In terms of educational policy the task is a classical bottom-up implementation problem. School level developments has the tendency to create models that – even if they are extremely successful - remain isolated within the whole system. Such developments almost never or rarely impose a spreading around impact on other schools without pro-active and deliberate policy support. There are certain policy tools that are able to support the spreading of the results of model site developments. These tools are the following:

- Strengthening the professional autonomy of the schools that allows for better adjustment to the needs of their clients;
- Deploying supplementary resources to the schools to cover the costs of innovation and extra services;
- Fostering the exchange of information and experience within the system;
- Building coalitions around certain developmental objectives.

Apart from these tools there are two complementary bottom-up implementation strategies for evoking the above mentioned spreading around impact: the project dissemination strategy and the systemic scaling-up strategy. The main differences between the two patterns of policies are the following:

The policy of dissemination	The policy of systemic scaling-up
The central question is: what are they doing and how?	The central question is: what are the conditions that allow them to do it?
The objective is the dissemination of the know-how.	The objective is to create the applicability of the know-how.
The most important tool is creating a network of co-operating schools.	The most important tool is modifying the systemic environment of schools.
In terms of adjusting to the local context the policy is relatively inflexible.	In terms of adjusting to the local context the policy is relatively flexible.
The impact on the functioning of the schools is direct, intensive and immediate.	The impact on the functioning of the schools is indirect, less intensive and delayed.
The number of schools involved is limited.	The number of schools involved is not

	limited.
Due to the project type of operation the innovation often remains isolated within the schools.	The innovation more easily infiltrate the entire functioning of the school.
The specific costs of development are high.	Due to the use of existing institutions and services the specific costs of development are lower.
Channeling in external resources is easier, the burden on the state budget is lower.	Channeling in external resources is harder, the burden on the state budget is bigger.
Ensuring cost-efficiency is easier.	Ensuring cost-efficiency is harder.

In an ideal case the two approaches to bottom-up implementation are combined. However, due to the limited amount of resources decision makers may give preference to one of them. When judging upon the weight of the two implementation strategies the following conditions are worth to be considered:

- *The scope of the problem*, that is, the size of the target group and the number of target institutions, the levels of education that are affected, etc. If the scope of the policy problem reaches a certain extent the systemic scaling-up strategy is better to be emphasized.
- *The level of decentralization*. In more decentralized systems the dissemination strategy is more feasible than the other one.
- *The maturity of support mechanisms and other conditions of school level quality improvement*. The systemic scaling-up strategy requires a mature and effective pedagogical-professional support mechanism in place that is at the disposal of innovative programs in the schools.
- *The source of resources*. If most of the required resources are provided by non-governmental development agencies only a dissemination strategy can be pursued.
- *Level of political and governmental commitment*. Due to the longer period of time and the wider use of public resources in the systemic scaling-up implementation model this commitment is essential.
- *The level of financial accountability*. Since ensuring cost-effective implementation via public agencies is harder the accountability related concerns may provide arguments in favor of the dissemination model.

Bottom-up implementation is successful only if the different kinds of supplementary resources (financial resources, human resources, services and information) are used in an effective way. This means, that if the *absorbing capacity* of the schools is high, bottom-up implementation is effective; if it's low, the implementation should be matched with top-down measures. The absorbing capacity of schools can be described by four criteria:

- The capacity of the staff to change,
- The willingness of the staff to change,
- The quality of institutional functioning of the schools (management, internal co-operation, external relationships, etc.)
- Accountability.

We can take the risk to assume that the absorbing capacity of those schools that educate Roma children are typically low. A school development project by permanent communication and consulting quite “easily” can ensure the appropriate use of the resources deployed to the projects sites. On a systemic scale it’s not that easy. In order to avoid huge “implementation deficit” the tools of mandate, capacity building, incentives, persuasion and support institutions should be built into the systemic environment of schools. Therefore, when the policy implications of grass-root developments are drawn the entire systems of governance, curriculum and examination, financing, textbook and teaching material publishing, teacher training, research and development, etc. should be reconsidered.

Paper #2 Roma Education Research Project: General Policy

Recommendations *This is a working document and will be revised. Please do not quote.

OVERVIEW

Roma school-age children and youth in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have lower levels of academic achievement and school completion rates than the general student population. There are a complex set of factors that have contributed to the lack of educational achievement and school completion among Roma children and youth. These factors include access of Roma children to appropriate educational opportunities, quality of schooling, continued discrimination toward Roma children, and attitudes of Roma children and adults toward public schools (reflecting both Roma cultural beliefs and Roma reaction to a history of discriminatory treatment).

Due to both resource and time limitations, the seven Roma education programs examined by our research project focused on particular policy problems rather than seeking to address the entire complex of factors which contribute to the lack of educational achievement among Roma. Our research revealed that program interventions addressing certain problems resulted in measurable and significant gains in educational achievement among Roma students. Although these gains reduced the educational achievement “gaps” between Roma students and the general student population by a significant amount, they did not eliminate these gaps. Moreover, the remains were still large. Program interventions focusing on other problems resulted in significant observable changes in schools. Although these changes did not produce immediate, measurable gains in educational achievement for Roma students, they did have the potential for significantly closing the achievement gap in the long term. From a policy perspective, our research results suggest that there are no simple remedies to addressing the educational needs of Roma children and youth. Governments need to implement policies which address this entire constellation of problems and factors in order to eliminate the educational achievement and school attainment gaps between Roma students and the general student population.

Our research also suggests that progress may be made toward accomplishing this goal by focusing on the implementation of policies that focus on addressing particular policy problems. Thus, governments can begin or advance efforts to improve educational attainment of Roma students by addressing specific factors sequentially rather than simultaneously – over time expanding the scope of their work to encompass additional causal factors in an incremental manner. This is likely to be a more practical alternative for governments given resource limitations and the practical need to produce some student outcome results in the

short-term. At this point, we do not have any evidence to suggest that addressing any one of the policy problems should take priority over the others. So initial government choices can reflect existing opportunities, resources, and needs in the country.

In the following numbered sections, we have identified several categories of policy problems and a range of possible policy approaches based on our research of the seven Roma education research programs. At the beginning of each numbered section, the italicized statements describe the causal relationships between policy problems and educational achievement of Roma students. Within each numbered section, we have described a series of policy problems, then described the “Program Strategy” used by specific programs to address the problem. Finally, we list a series of general policy recommendations designed to address each policy problem.

1. ROMA ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Low levels of academic achievement and school completion by Roma children and youth (compared to the general student population) reflect their limited access to educational opportunities available to the general student population. Increasing access to these educational opportunities will result in short-term gains in academic achievement and long-term gains in school completion among Roma children and youth.

Preschool Preparation

Problem: *Roma children have limited access to high-quality preschool preparation. Increasing their access to high-quality preschool programs will result in short-term gains in the academic achievement of Roma students in the primary grades.*

Program Strategy: Center-based preschool programs specifically targeted on Roma children conducted by non-school agency. Programs incorporated community-based recruitment of participating children, use of developmentally-appropriate teaching methodology, emphasis on developing language competency in majority language, exposure to classroom environment, and delivery of non-education services (meals, bathing, clothes washing, and personal hygiene). [Source of Program Research from Macedonia, Slovakia, and Yugoslavia/Serbia]

Policy Recommendations:

- Establish Preschool Outreach Programs in Roma neighborhoods. Program staff will identify preschool-age Roma children and encourage families to enroll them in available preschool/kindergarten programs. Programs must be neighborhood-based and can be operated by Roma NGO’s or public schools using RTA’s.
- Ensure that public preschool/kindergarten class in public school is readily accessible to Roma preschool-age children. If such classes are not available through the public schools, such a program should be established in a site within the Roma neighborhood. The class should be associated with and operate as an extension of a local public school.
- Preschool/kindergarten staff working with Roma students should complete training activities focusing on use of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies based on current educational research, particularly strategies effective for working with language-minority students. Certify or establish appropriate training programs offered

by institutions of higher education, teacher training agencies, public schools, Roma NGO's, or directly through government agencies.

- Require preschool/kindergarten programs working with Roma students to incorporate specific activities targeted on Roma children. These activities will build competency in the majority language, build knowledge and familiarity with public school classroom rules and procedures, and provide opportunities for personal hygiene.

Academic support and remediation

Problem: *Roma children have limited access to appropriate academic support and remediation programs. Increasing their access to appropriate academic support and remediation programs will result in short-term gains in academic achievement of Roma students at all grade levels.*

Program Strategy: Center-based academic remediation program specifically targeted on Roma children conducted by non-school agency. [Source of Program Research from Macedonia and Slovakia]

Program Strategy: Academic remediation program specifically targeted on Roma children conducted by school. [Source of Program Research from Czech Republic and Romania]

Policy Recommendations:

- Establish after-school Academic Support Centers for Roma children and youth. Centers will provide direct tutoring and homework assistance (one-on-one and small group) to Roma students. In addition, Centers may offer supplemental classes focusing on building competency in the majority language and mastering basic skills and knowledge in mathematics, science, and social studies. Centers will be open to Roma students of all ages. Centers should be located in sites easily accessible to Roma students, preferably in Roma neighborhoods. If public schools are available and have space, they should be used to house the Centers. Centers should be established and operated by Roma NGO's working in consultation with the local public school(s) serving Roma students. Center staff can include community educators, RTA's, or public school teachers. Some staff must have familiarity with Roma language.
- Academic Support Center staff should complete training activities focusing on tutoring strategies. Certify or establish appropriate training programs offered by institutions of higher education, teacher training agencies, Roma NGO's, or directly by government agencies.
- Public schools serving Roma students should establish a Roma Student Support Team. The Team will include school administrator, teachers, RTA's (if available at school), and representative of local Roma NGO working directly with Roma students (ideally the NGO operating the local Academic Support Center). The Team will meet regularly to recommend specific Roma students for attending the Academic Support Center and identifying specific academic support needs of the students. The Roma Student Support Team will serve as the link with the Academic Support Center.

Enrollment in primary grades

Problem: *A lower percentage of Roma children are enrolled in the primary grades and begin their formal schooling experience in a timely manner. Increasing the proportion of Roma children enrolled in the primary grades will result in long-term gains in the proportion of Roma children completing school.*

Program Strategy: Program staff familiar both to Roma parents of school-age children and to staff in the public school facilitate the successful and timely enrollment of Roma children in the primary grades. [Source of Program Research from Macedonia, Slovakia, and Yugoslavia/Serbia]

Policy Recommendations:

- Preschool Outreach Program staff will work with Roma families to arrange timely enrollment of Roma children in first grade (or in subsequent grades). Where needed, Preschool Outreach Program staff will accompany Roma families to enrollment process in school.
- Public school administrators and staff should meet with Preschool Outreach Program staff on an annual basis to identify and address any problems or challenges associated with the timely enrollment of Roma students into first grade. School should identify specific accommodations needed to ensure successful enrollment of Roma students, including translated materials, flexible enrollment times, and availability of language interpreters.

2. ATTENDANCE OF ROMA STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

As compared to the general student population, Roma children and youth enrolled in school are more likely to be absent from school. Lower attendance means less exposure to academic lessons conducted in school. Less exposure in turn contributes to poorer academic performance in class and lower academic achievement overall. Improving attendance by Roma children will result in medium-term gains in their academic achievement and long-term gains in school completion by Roma children and youth.

Engagement of Roma Students in Classroom Lessons

Problem: *Roma students do not attend school regularly because they are not engaged by the content of the classroom lessons. Making the content of classroom lessons more engaging for Roma students will result in short-term declines in their absence from school.*

Program Strategy: Teachers incorporate accurate information on Roma history, culture, and literature into classroom lessons to increase interest of Roma students in the content of some lessons. [Source of Program Research from Bulgaria and Romania]

Policy Recommendations:

- Create high-quality instructional materials on Roma literature, culture, and history. These materials should reflect the range of perspectives of Roma groups within the country. Materials should be created collaboratively by appropriate local Roma community members, local scholars, and local educators. Materials should be targeted at specific age groups (preschool, primary, elementary, intermediate, and secondary).

- Create a curriculum framework to provide teachers guidance in the classroom use of the instructional materials.
- Distribute both instructional materials and curriculum frameworks to all schools in the country.
- Certify or establish training activities focusing on strategies for incorporating these instructional materials into classroom lessons and teaching practices. Training activities can be offered by institutions of higher education, teacher training agencies, Roma NGO's, public schools, or directly by government agencies.

Effects of Discriminatory Treatment

Problem: *Roma students do not attend school regularly due to the discriminatory treatment and attitudes of non-Roma school staff and students. The discriminatory behavior and attitudes make schools unpleasant environments for Roma children. This reduces their motivation or interest in attending school on a regular basis. Improving the attitudes of non-Roma adults and children toward Roma students and reducing the incidence of discriminatory behavior toward the Roma students will make schools more pleasant environments over time. This will result in medium-term declines in absentee rates among Roma students.*

Program Strategy: Intercultural education activities and incorporation of accurate information on Roma history, culture, and literature into classroom lessons reduce discriminatory behavior and attitudes of non-Roma adults and children. [Source of Program Research from Bulgaria and Romania]

Policy Recommendations:

- Require all schools to develop and implement an intercultural education plan. Plan must include (1) measurable intercultural education goals for the school, (2) description of training activities to be undertaken by staff, (3) description of materials to be used to support intercultural education activities, (4) identification of resource individuals to be used in support of intercultural education activities, (5) description of community outreach and engagement activities, and (6) description of strategies to be used to incorporate intercultural education into classroom lessons. Establish a national competitive grant program to support implementation of intercultural education plans by schools with high-need. Schools that include Roma students must incorporate in their plan the use of instructional materials and teaching activities focused on Roma literature, culture, and history.
- Establish a national support and resource network to assist schools in the development and implementation of the intercultural education plans. Network will include institutions of higher education, education organizations (including training agencies), Roma NGO's, public schools with exemplary intercultural education programs, and appropriate government agencies. Network will offer training and direct assistance in the development and implementation of intercultural education plans.
- Certify or establish two types of training activities. The first type of training activity will target administrators and will focus on all aspects of the development and implementation of effective intercultural education plans. The second type of training activity will focus on teachers and will focus on classroom integration of intercultural education. All activities could be offered by institutions of higher education, education organizations (including training agencies), public schools, Roma NGO's, and appropriate government agencies.

Attitude of Parents Toward Public Schools

Problem: *Roma students do not attend school regularly because Roma parents are not supportive of the public schools nor do they encourage their children to have regular attendance. Changing the attitudes and knowledge of Roma parents toward public schooling will make them more supportive of their children attending school regularly. This will result in medium-term declines in absentee rates among Roma students.*

Program Strategy: Program staff conduct training program targeting Roma parents to inform and educate them about the importance public schools and the necessity of regular school attendance. [Source of Program Research from Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Yugoslavia/Serbia]

Program Strategy: Teachers incorporate accurate information on Roma history, culture, and literature into classroom lessons to make content of classroom lessons more reflective of the Roma. [Source of Program Research from Bulgaria and Romania] >> [NOTE: This strategy is linked to strategies responding to Engagement of Roma Students in Classroom Lessons and Effects of Discriminatory Treatment]

Program Strategy: Presence of RTAs provides familiar and culturally-sensitive contact with the schools for the Roma parents. [Source of Program Research from Czech Republic]

Policy Recommendations:

- Require all schools serving Roma students to establish a Parent Outreach Center in the school. The Center will serve as a source for translated parent information about the school and a site for parent training activities. Centers will be staffed by trained RTA's and/or staff from local Roma NGO's. Center staff will also function as intermediaries between the school and Roma parents to identify and resolve problems related to Roma students' education.
- Create and disseminate translated parent information materials for Roma parents.
- Develop and disseminate model parent training programs designed to build support of Roma parents for public schooling. Model parent training programs can be developed and disseminated by Roma NGO's, institutions of higher education, public schools, and appropriate government agencies.

3. QUALITY OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Public school classrooms are not appropriately organized to effectively meet the learning needs of Roma children and youth. Nor do public school teachers employ the range and type of teaching strategies needed to meet the learning needs of Roma children and youth. These inadequacies in the public schools contribute to the lower levels of academic achievement among Roma students and their lower level of school completion. However, it has to be recognized that even changes put in place in the short-term in the structure and operation of schools will result in gains in student academic achievement only over the long-term.

Comprehensive, School-Based Educational Change Initiative

Problem: *Schools lack the knowledge and capacity to implement comprehensive school-based educational change initiatives which will result in the use of best teaching practices identified in current educational research. However, the conservative and systemic nature of school organizations means that implementing changes in the schools and in the classrooms will be an incremental and time-consuming process. The changes will only result in changes in academic achievement among Roma students over the long-term.*

Program Strategy: Program provides training, information, materials, and an ongoing support network (1) for teachers to encourage and support the implementation of best teaching practices, (2) for administrators to encourage and support the implementation of innovative school management structures and practices, and (3) for administrators and teachers to encourage and support the implementation of community outreach and parent engagement efforts. [Source of Program Research from Romania]

Policy Recommendations:

- Require all schools serving Roma students to establish and implement an ongoing School Improvement Plan designed to better address the learning needs of Roma children. This plan must define measurable goals related to changes in school operation, changes in classroom teaching practices, and improvement in Roma student outcomes. In addition, the plan must describe (1) proposed training activities, (2) possible institutional collaborators, partners, or service providers, and (3) resource needs.
- Establish a national competitive grant program to support the implementation of School Improvement Plan in high-need schools with significant concentrations of Roma students.
- Create a nationwide support network to provide training and technical assistance to school administrators in the development, management, and implementation of effective School Improvement Plan. Training and technical assistance activities should focus on school management issues, engagement of Roma parents, and collaboration with appropriate community institutions. This network could encompass institutions of higher education, education agencies (including teacher training agencies), Roma NGO's, public schools with exemplary school improvement plans, and appropriate government agencies.
- Create informational materials for administrators providing guidance on effective strategies for (1) developing, managing, and implementing a successful school improvement plan, (2) successfully engaging Roma parents, and (3) successfully collaborating with appropriate community institutions in support of school improvement efforts. These informational materials should reflect the work of both national and international education experts.
- Create a nationwide support network to provide training and technical assistant to classroom teachers regarding the use of best teaching practices that effectively meet the learning needs of Roma students and reflect the results of current educational research. This network could encompass institutions of higher education, education agencies (including teacher training organizations), Roma NGO's, public schools, and appropriate government agencies.
- Create informational materials for classroom teachers summarizing relevant results of educational research and their implications for best teaching practices. These

informational materials should reflect the work of both national and international education experts.

Best Teaching Practices (Using Roma Teaching Assistants)

Problem: *Teaching practices used in the classroom do not reflect best practices identified in current educational research. As a result, these practices do not address the learning needs or styles of Roma students. Changing the practices used by teachers will be a time-consuming process. It will result in gains in academic achievement among Roma students only over the long-term.*

Program Strategy: RTAs provide additional classroom support to teachers to allow them to learn about and implement best teaching practices. [Source of Program Research from Czech Republic]

Program Strategy: Program provides training, instructional materials, and support network for teachers to encourage and enable their use of best teaching practices as reflected in current educational research. [Source of Program Research from Romania] .>> [NOTE: This policy recommendations for implementing this strategy are encompassed in the discussion of “Comprehensive, School-Based Educational Change Initiative”]

Policy Recommendations:

- Establish “Roma Teaching Assistant” as officially-recognized public school position. Establish appropriate qualifications for position which include working knowledge of Roma language and participation or completion of appropriate training activities.
- Establish three categories of RTA: RTA Trainee (non-certified RTA still participating in basic training activities); Certified RTA (RTA who has completed basic training activities); and Senior RTA (certified RTA with at least three years of experience who had completed advanced training activities). Define scope of responsibilities for the three categories of RTA. Establish graduated salary structure with salary increasing from RTA Trainee to Certified RTA to Senior RTA. Salaries can also be adjusted to reflect varying roles and responsibilities.
- Establish flexible training requirements for becoming Certified RTA (basic training requirement) and Senior RTA (advanced training requirement). Certify or establish training options organized around training workshops, on-the-job training, independent study, or combinations of these three approaches. Training programs can be conducted by institutions of higher education, non-profit education organizations (including staff training organizations), Roma NGO’s, public schools, or appropriate government agencies. Senior RTA’s can be recruited to staff training programs.
- Place RTA’s in all schools serving Roma students. Number of RTAs should reflect the relative number of Roma students attending the school. Each school must establish a plan that defines specific measurable goals for the use of the RTAs in the school relative to the learning needs of Roma children and their families. In addition, the plan should describe the specific roles of RTAs in the school. Possible roles could include use: (1) as classroom teaching assistants (to assist with behavioral or learning issues of Roma students and/or to allow teachers to implement innovative teaching practices), (2) to provide in-school academic support to Roma students, (3) as staff of preschool/ kindergarten classes for Roma students, (4) as staff in after-school Academic Support Center programs, (5) as staff in Preschool Outreach Programs, and (6) as staff in Parent Outreach Centers.

- Require administrators and teachers in schools with RTA's to complete appropriate training activities associated with the effective use of RTA's in the school and/or classroom. Certify or establish the appropriate training activities for administrators and teachers. Activities to be offered by institutions of higher education, nonprofit education organizations (including teacher training agencies), Roma NGOs, public schools, and appropriate government agencies.

Teacher Understanding of Students' Strengths & Learning Needs

Problem: *Public school classroom teachers need to build a greater understanding of the academic strengths and learning needs of Roma students in their classroom. By gaining such an understanding, teachers will be able to more effectively employ particular teaching strategies to build on their strengths and respond to these needs. In the short-term, this will create a better learning environment for Roma students. This, in turn, will result in short-term gains in the academic achievement of Roma students.*

Program Strategy: Program staff (both preschool and remediation program staff) meet regularly with public school classroom teachers to discuss the academic strengths and learning needs of Roma students who formerly or currently participated in the Roma education program (either the preschool or remediation program). [Source of Program Research from Macedonia, Slovakia, and Yugoslavia/Serbia]

Policy Recommendations:

- Require teachers with Roma students in their classroom to conduct a conference on each Roma student twice a year. Conferences should include the student's classroom teacher from the previous year (including the preschool/kindergarten teacher if the student is in first grade). In addition, the conference should include staff from the afterschool Academic Support Center if the student is participating in such activities. Each conference should discuss student's ongoing progress and learning needs and should identify strategies for responding to those needs. Teachers can contact the Roma Student Support Team in the school to request additional assistance in meeting the learning needs of specific students.
- Establish a standard student reporting form for use by preschool, public school, and afterschool program teachers to document student progress and needs in various academic and non-academic categories (i.e. reading, writing, and speaking in the majority language; mathematics skills and knowledge; science; social studies; relationship with other students; and classroom behavior). These reporting forms will be centrally maintained by the public school but will be available for use by appropriate public school or after-school program staff, as well as by the student and his/her parents or guardians. Staff will be available to interpret and explain information to students and parents/guardians during regular parent conferences or at request of parent/guardian.

Roma Student Classroom Behavior

Problem: *Many public school teachers are unable to maintain appropriate levels of discipline and appropriate standards of behavior among Roma students in their classrooms. Disciplinary and behavior problems serve to distract both the individual Roma students and the classroom as a whole from the process of learning. By more effectively address*

disciplinary and behavior issues among Roma children in the classroom, teachers can provide Roma students more time to focus on learning activities. Better classroom discipline and more time for learning will result in short-term academic achievement gains for Roma students.

Program Strategy: RTAs (as one of their school-based functions) work with teachers on student behavior issues associated with Roma students and directly intervene with Roma students to resolve classroom behavior of students. [Source of Program Research for Czech Republic] NOTE: This strategy is encompassed in the description of RTA's relative to "Best Teaching Practices (Using Roma Teaching Assistants)"

4. ASSESSING ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN EDUCATING ROMA STUDENTS

Decision-makers lack the capacity to monitor the progress of Roma education programs in accomplishing their goals and assess their impact on schools, Roma students, and their parents. As a result, schools and programs cannot be held accountable for accomplishing their goals. Nor can schools and programs be appropriately changed to better accomplish their goals. [NOTE: This policy issue emerged from the data collection and research experiences of the Roma Education Research Project rather than the work of the Roma education programs. Specific problems are more significant in some countries rather than in others.]

Capacity to Collect and Maintain Information

Problem: *Schools possess only limited capacity to systematically and accurately maintain statistical information on school enrollment, attendance, and achievement by students over time. This limits the ability of decision-makers to identify changes over time associated with specific Roma education programs.*

Policy Recommendations:

- Require all schools to collect and report specific categories of student data including enrollment status, attendance, and academic achievement. Provide standard definitions of all relevant categories (i.e. Who is considered "enrollee" or a "dropout"? How should attendance be reported – by lesson or school day?)
- Provide financial assistance to ensure that all schools have the knowledge and tools to accurately collect and report required student data.
- Establish a central repository to gather and archive all student data reported by schools. Data should be maintained in computerized form whenever possible.

Identification of Roma Students

Problem: *Collection of education outcome data on Roma students is at times in conflict with efforts by countries to reduce discriminatory treatment of Roma. As a result, schools are prevented from specifically identifying Roma students by anti-discrimination laws. However, such identification is necessary to assess and monitor changes in educational outcomes for Roma students compared to the general student population. It is necessary to find a balance between the anti-discrimination requirements and appropriate data collection requirements so that both policies are effectively advanced. [NOTE: This is significant in only some of the countries.]*

Policy Recommendations:

- Establish new national legislation or revised existing legislation to define appropriate circumstances under which ethnicity of public school student can be identified, recorded, and archived. Legislation must balance the need for information to ensure that minority needs (including educational needs) are being adequately met with the need to protect individuals from discriminatory practices.
- Require schools and other appropriate public agencies to establish specific procedures and criteria for making student data available to individuals outside the school or agency (including for public information purposes). Procedures and criteria should differentiate between the release of individual student data and aggregate student data (which does not include any individual identifiers).
- Establish procedures and criteria for providing access to student data maintained in any central national archives. Procedures and criteria should support and encourage the use of student data by decision-makers for program assessment purposes.

Standard Program Assessment Tools and Measures

Problem: *Standard tools and measures for assessing academic progress of students are not available to schools. Such tools and measures are necessary to allow assessment between programs, between sites, and over time.*

Policy Recommendations:

- Develop or identify appropriate national student assessment tools and measures. Where possible, adapt existing international student assessment tools and measures. Ensure that student assessment tools and measures identified for use are valid for assessing educational achievement of particular student age group and reliable for assessing educational achievement of students in different geographical areas and from different ethnic groups (particularly minority groups such as the Roma). These tools and measures should be cost-effective and suitable for wide-scale administration across the country.
- Encourage a policy of data-driven decision-making regarding the assessment of educational programs at all levels including within the public schools. Create national training activities for educational decision-makers (including school administrators and teachers) regarding the effective use of statistical and qualitative data in making effective decisions. Training activities can be conducted by institutions of higher education, non-profit organizations, Roma NGO's, public schools, and

#7 Focus on collecting data and evaluating the success of Roma education programs

Methodological Challenges and Lessons Learned

During the course of this research project, the local research teams confronted conditions and situations which limited the effective and efficient collection of some, relevant research information. Some of these challenges were unanticipated. Others were anticipated, but their extent and magnitude were more significant than expected. These conditions and situations

required the research teams to employ alternative strategies in gathering particular types of research information, or to collect alternative types of information entirely.

Time Limitations

The most significant limiting factor in this research project was time. Data collection and analysis associated with this research project occurred during a six-month period: from October 2000 until March 2001.⁵ This severely compressed time frame was made necessary by the compelling need for immediate information on Roma education programs by the OSI Education Sub-Board.

The project deadlines forced the researchers to accelerate the initial preparation of the research plan. This meant that some aspects of the plans were still under development, even as their implementation was begun. It also meant that the research teams were unable to conduct a more extensive review of the national education system and legal framework in each country. A more extensive review may have allowed the teams to identify and better anticipate some of the challenges which later emerged during the project and to develop plans that more effectively responded to these challenges. The researchers consistently reported that a longer preparation time would have enabled the development of better approaches to their field research.

The limited time frame forced the research teams to emphasize the rapid and timely collection of relevant research data during each phase of the research plan. This pressure caused the researchers to reduce the amount of time they devoted to reflecting on the information being collected. This meant that some issues and problems relevant to the programs and their impact did not emerge until later in the research process. At times, they emerged too late for additional information to be collected to address some of these issues and problems. This time pressure also meant that the research teams could not engage program stakeholders in reflecting on the research information to the degree desired in a participatory research model. However, it is important to emphasize that key program stakeholders were effectively engaged in the research process – even if their level of engagement could have been increased had more time been available.

Collecting Student Records

A second significant and consistent set of challenges faced by the research teams related to student records. Access to student records was difficult across the entire region. There were few, centralized repositories for student records. Generally, student records were located only in individual schools. Most were under the control of individual school administrators (also known as school directors, headmasters, or principals), although some were even maintained only by classroom teachers. There are, apparently, few requirements for maintenance of these records or for permitting public access to these records for research purposes. As a result, obtaining access to these records often required negotiations between the research team and individual school administrators. For the larger, nationwide programs, this requirement could be particularly time-consuming.

Once access was achieved, the challenges did not end. Compiling and synthesizing student records was made more difficult by the condition of some of the records. Time often had to be spent physically locating the records and searching for the relevant information in the records. Given the limited resources available in the region, it came as no surprise that few records were computerized. However, this added to the challenges of collecting the information.

These comments should not be taken in any way as a criticism of the administrators, teachers, and other staff in the schools. The economic situation in many of these countries has resulted in reductions in national funding for education. With these cuts, have come reductions in salaries and personnel. With such pressures facing educational professionals in the schools, it should come as no surprise that record-keeping efforts might fall by the wayside. Even in countries where such pressures are less significant, school administrators and teachers understandably direct most of their efforts towards helping their students. Record-keeping was generally seen as a bureaucratic distraction, rather than a contribution to the education of children.

This attitude toward record-keeping was actually only a manifestation of a deeper set of attitudes among school professionals, which created another challenge for the local research teams. Most educators in the public schools failed to appreciate the value of the research and assessment activities being conducted as part of the project. In some cases, this led to reluctance and even outright resistance on the part of administrators and teachers. In most cases, this lack of understanding limited their capacity for effectively participating in, contributing to, and benefiting from the research work.

Of course, educators in the public schools of Central and Eastern Europe are not alone in these attitudes toward educational research and assessment. These attitudes can be seen in public schools around the world. Often they are based upon the real failures of traditional research methodologies and approaches, which treat the educators and their students as subjects to be studied, rather than people from whom to learn. These approaches have produced esoteric and sterile products, which possess little relevance to the daily needs of the educators and their students. In an effort to maintain an illusory “objectivity”, many researchers have created barriers to communicating with educational practitioners and made it almost impossible for these practitioners to build a greater understanding of the research process.

Obviously, our participatory research approach was designed, in part, to address these limitations of more traditional research models. Despite this intent, our research has continued to suffer from the mistakes of the past researchers.

We also found that some school communities exhibited tremendous suspicion of all outsiders. In some cases, this attitude reflected past conflicts with national or regional governmental authorities. In others, it was a response to critical news stories about the school or related to minority education issues. In either case, these educators were unduly sensitive to outside scrutiny and were reluctant to cooperate with the local research teams. This required the researchers to invest more time in building the trust and confidence of these staff – an effort that was not always successful. As our research progressed, it became obvious that development and use of personal relationships and informal networks of colleagues were particularly effective strategies for gaining access to student records and other relevant research information.

Identification of Roma Students

In some of the countries, the local research team faced considerable difficulties identifying Roma students. Several of the countries included in this research project (particularly the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic) prohibit the use of racial or ethnic identification of students. Given the history of prejudice and oppression of these minority groups, such a

decision can be readily understood. At the same time, such a policy makes documenting the educational condition of Roma students and tracking changes in their situation very difficult.

Even where such policies do not exist, the identification of Roma children and families can be problematic. Relying on self-identification results in some Roma identifying themselves with a less oppressed ethnic minority group in the country, or even with the majority ethnic group. Given the prejudice and oppression directed at Roma throughout Central and Eastern Europe, such a decision on the part of some Roma is not surprising. However, it does make the identification of Roma students more difficult and less reliable. In general, our local research teams, like most other researchers, were forced to rely on self-identification of Roma, despite the limitations inherent in the approach. No ready alternatives presented themselves.

It also became evident during this research that national legal policies developed to prevent ethnic discrimination were also limiting the collection of information for the purposes of education research, program documentation and program evaluation. This occurred because policies failed to distinguish between ethnic identification for discriminatory purposes and that conducted for the purposes of research or program development, assessment, and documentation. From a research perspective, information on the ethnicity of individuals could be collected but then maintained and used in an anonymous manner to protect the identify of any individual. This would be sufficient for research or program-related purposes, while preventing the potential for discriminatory action against any individual. Unfortunately, current policies in several countries are sufficiently broad to prevent the official collection of data in this manner, even for research purposes. Our data collection experiences suggest the need to review existing national policies regarding ethnic identification of individuals, to ensure that mechanisms are established to allow legitimate research and program development aimed at improving the living conditions of the disadvantaged and oppressed groups.

Finding Comparison Groups of Students

In order to provide a context for assessing the impact of each program on Roma students, the research teams sought to identify appropriate comparison groups. However, several teams reported that Roma comparison groups were both difficult and time-consuming to find.

Those programs which provided direct services to Roma students (including those in Macedonia, the Slovak Republic, and Yugoslavia) often focused their efforts on specific neighborhoods, settlements, and communities. The researchers found that within these communities, most Roma children were participating in the programs. This meant that there were few Roma children available to serve as a comparison group. This forced researchers to identify Roma children in other communities to serve in a comparison group. Moreover, the researchers had to seek this data without the connections that had been built between the program staff and school staff. This further compounded the challenges facing the research teams.

Past research suggested that most Roma children did not enroll in public school without some program interventions. As a result of this, the researchers found that students sought for comparison groups, were more likely to not be enrolled in school. However, this fact also made them much more difficult to locate. Compulsory education laws in each country often meant that parents and other Roma in the neighborhood were reluctant to admit that these

children even existed. Again, this required an investment by researchers in trust-building within these communities.

Researchers also found that it was difficult to collect comparable student data from earlier points in time. They found that in some cases past student data was not archived or easily accessible. This made it more difficult to identify baseline data in order to determine changes over time. The rapidly changing governmental, social, and economic conditions in some of these countries over the last two or three years added to the complications. In fact, the researchers recognized one important benefit of the data collected as part of this research project, is that it can serve as a baseline for assessing further changes resulting from these and other Roma education programs in the future.

Assessing Student Progress

Little use is made by the public schools in the region of standardized student achievement tests. Despite the real limitations of standardized tests as a measure of student achievement, particularly when used alone and with minority populations, these tests are a useful tool for comparing student achievement over time and over different sites.

One alternative would have been for our project to administer a standardized assessment instrument to different Roma and non-Roma populations across the region. Although this would not have provided us with information on change over time, it would have provided some useful comparison data. Unfortunately, this project lacked both the resources and the time to conduct such a mass- testing effort. This project chose instead to rely on multiple indicators of student growth and progress, including mark level and school completion rates, class marks, attendance rates, and student behavior. Nevertheless, standardized achievement test results would have been a valuable, additional tool for the research project.

Isolating the Impact of Program Interventions

Another challenge mentioned by some local researchers was their difficulty in isolating the impact of the specific intervention being studied on the participating institution and target population. This was particularly true, when several interventions were being implemented in a single site. The reality in most countries and most schools was that multiple programs were being employed and that often complex interactions arose. Rarely was just one program operating in isolation.

Although this research project sought to gather information and understand the context within which each project operated, our time and capacity to collect and analyze this information was limited. Moreover, many of the projects being examined have only operated for a short time and in only a relatively small number of sites. This also made it difficult to identify and understand the different interactions that may be occurring among different program interventions under different educational conditions. Ultimately, further research must be focused on these crucial issues.

Implications of Methodological Challenges

Taken together, these challenges did create unexpected limitations in the research activities. However, these problems did not fatally compromise the quality of the research project.

At the same time, these challenges have important implications for future research on Roma education in the region. Given the growing importance of assessment and accountability on the part of private and government funders of education change efforts, issues of record collection, maintenance, and access will take on increasing importance. Equally important will be the development of a greater understanding on the part of school administrators and staff to the importance and value of program research and assessment efforts. Building such greater understanding is a potential result of projects like this one, using a participatory research approach. Such benefits justify greater use of such a participatory research approach in the future.