Programs Serving Roma Students
Proposed Research Concept

Research Questions: The Open Society Institute seeks to evaluate several educational programs designed to serve Roma children in various European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia). Through this research, the Open Society Initiative seeks to examine the following categories of questions. Specifically, it seeks to find out:

- What is the feasibility of program replication within each country and across countries based on issues of cost, resources, institutions, and culture?

- How effective is each program in getting and keeping Roma children in school and at improving the educational achievement of Roma children? In particular, we will assess the correlation of program participation and student attendance, academic performance, dropout and graduation rates, students returning to school to graduate, and secondary school/university entrance rates.

- Has the program promoted systemic change to advance goals of equity and quality in the schools?

- Has there been a change in attitude in teachers and other school staff, non-Roma students and parents and the community at large?

The results of this research will be distributed to the Soros Foundation network and to national governmental and non-governmental officials to enhance efforts to improve the educational opportunities for Roma children in Europe.

Participatory Approach: The proposed research design will be grounded in a participatory model. Such a model emphasizes the active engagement of a program's designers, staff, participants, and other stakeholders in the development and implementation of the research. The role of the lead researcher in a participatory research is not to serve as an external and detached "judge" or "auditor" of the program. Rather, the lead researcher will carry out several well-defined roles designed to support and enhance and research "partnership" with those interested and involved in the program.

This participatory model has three distinct benefits. First, it enables the research to directly draw upon the observations and insights of both "program insiders" (program designers, staff, participants, and other stakeholders) and "program outsiders" (researchers). Second, it actively involves a program's staff, participants, and other stakeholders in developing the research design, collecting the data, and deriving conclusions/recommendations. This gives them both greater understanding and greater commitment to the results – making it more likely that those results will be applied in the field. Finally, this model strengthens the capacity of each local program to understand, conduct, and eventually conduct their own research.

Methodology:

The research design will be organized around **two levels of data collection and analysis**.

Level One: The first level emphasizes breadth and consistency. It focuses on collecting consistent categories of accessible, primarily quantitative, data on all programs, sites, activities, staff, and participants. Generally, it emphasizes data that is routinely collected by the program or by governmental institutions. In the case of the education programs under examination here, this could include –

- Written descriptions of the programs, budgets, and staffing information
- Participant attendance rolls for program activities
- Student enrollment, school attendance, grades, test results, disciplinary actions, graduation and dropout rates, and secondary school/university enrollment rates.

This routinely-collected data could be supplemented by the administration of short surveys to program designers, managers, and staff to collect consistent descriptive data on all programs or to program activity participants to obtain some feedback on the quality and impact of the activities.

Because the data will primarily be quantitative in nature, analysis will rely on relatively simple statistical manipulation (comparison of means and tests of significance). Data will generally be analyzed by program and by relevant characteristics within each program. For adult staff, this could include race/ethnicity, age, gender, position, and level of experience. For participating students, this could include age, gender, socioeconomic status, parents' educational experience, and students' previous educational achievement.

This first level analysis will provide a broad, initial set of responses to the sets of evaluation questions identified by the Open Society Initiative. At the same time, this analysis will help guide the design of the second level of data collection and analysis.

Level Two: The second level of the evaluation design will emphasize depth and detail rather than breadth. It will primarily rely on qualitative data collection strategies, including site observations, interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended instruments (like journals or narrative surveys). Data collection will focus on a stratified sample of sites and stratified random samples of program staff and participants. This data collection would emphasize more precise and descriptive information of the programs and their outcomes. For example, interviews of program designers and staff could emphasize the process associated with each program's creation and implementation. Staff journals could provide more detailed descriptions of program activities and the resources required to carry them out as well as their impact on students. Classroom observations could identify distinctive classroom behaviors and student impact.

Second level analysis will involve data transformation/statistical manipulation of qualitative data, pattern-matching, and holistic interpretation. The results will provide a deeper, more "textured" understanding of the initial set of responses from the first level

analysis. Taken together, these results will provide a more balanced and comprehensive set of responses to the evaluation questions identified by the Open Society Initiative.

In carrying out each level of data collection and analysis, the researchers will follow a four-step process. This will include:

- Step One: Refining specific research questions
- Step Two: Identification/Design of data collection instruments and procedures and of data analysis plans
- Step Three: Data collection and analysis
- Step Four: Synthesis and reporting of results

All four steps will be carried out initially for the first level of the research project. The last three steps will be carried out again as the second level of the research.

Researchers – The research will be carried out by a professional researcher, with the assistance of consultants when required. The lead researcher will be responsible for the following:

- Prepare a procedural plan for the research project
- Arrange the agenda in cooperation with IEP for the stakeholder and other planning meetings in Budapest
- Prepare data collection instruments (surveys, questionnaires, and interview protocols)
- Orient, support, and assist the local data collection teams and oversee the data collection process
- Summarize the data in both statistical and narrative form for analysis
- Conduct an analysis of the summary data in collaboration with IEP and the evaluation committee
- Prepare a written report of findings, conclusions and recommendations in response to the research questions

IEP will:

- Serve as a liaison with the programs, local foundations, and local government offices
- Identify and solve institutional/governmental problems that may arise
- Recruit the members of the evaluation committee and local data collection teams and arrange for any necessary financial compensation

- Provide logistical support to the local data collection teams(including translating materials between languages as needed)
- Organize and provide support for meetings
- Participate (with the evaluation committee) in the analysis of data and the development of the final report
- Assist in the production of the final report