10 GOALS

FOR IMPROVING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR ROMA
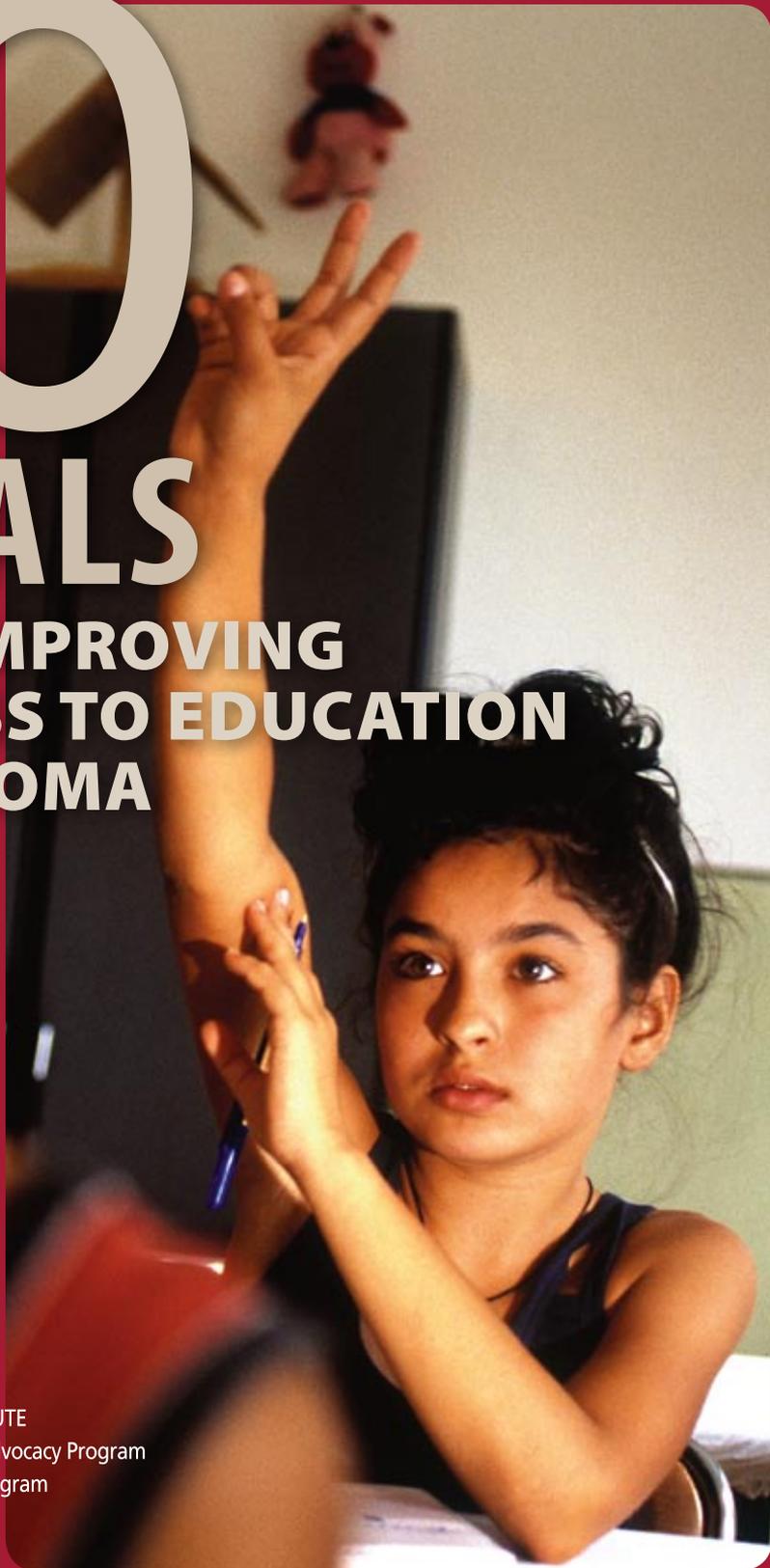
The estimated 10 million Roma across
Europe make up the continent's largest minority and one of
its most vulnerable groups. Without access to quality education,
Roma communities remain trapped in poverty and isolated at
society's margins. Governments and civil society have recognised the
problem and developed initiatives to address it. Positive, substantial
change, however, has been haphazard and slow.

Roma children continue to have much worse rates of participation
and performance in school than non-Roma children. Roma
children are often placed in schools for children with learning
disabilities simply because they are Roma. Schools with a high
percentage of Roma often lack the resources to give students the
skills and knowledge they need to get good jobs or access higher
education.

Improving education for Roma is challenging, but not impossible.
The obstacles facing Roma schoolchildren can be overcome
with political will and improved cooperation among various
stakeholders, including international organisations, national
governments, local school boards, and Roma communities.

The 10 goals presented below offer a set of objectives to help stakeholders define current challenges and take actions to improve education in order to benefit Roma children, their communities, and the larger societies in which they live.

Based on monitoring reports developed by three Open Society Institute (OSI) programmes that examined education for Roma in eight Central and Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia), the goals reflect the reports' findings and their recommendations for improving access to quality education for Roma.

The monitoring series—*Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma*—was produced by OSI's EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, in cooperation with the Education Support Program and the Roma Initiatives programme.

The continued marginalisation of Roma undermines Europe's potential as a community of states marked by peace, tolerance, and opportunity for all its inhabitants. Education is key to the inclusion of Roma as equal and active citizens. By consistently applying the 10 goals to their plans and activities, policymakers and civil society groups can improve education in order to help Roma schoolchildren become productive and respected members of their communities, their countries, and the greater European community.

1 Collect reliable, comprehensive, and comparable data.

Poor data is a problem in all the countries studied. Without this information, officials and advocates cannot determine who is succeeding, who is failing, and how to make appropriate policy changes.

Several governments prohibit the collection of personal data for statistical purposes. The protection of privacy is important—particularly for Roma concerned about data being used to their disadvantage. Yet, European Union data protection regulations establish safeguards against abuse.

Social stigma also contributes to poor and inaccurate data. Many Roma are legitimately worried about the discrimination they might face if they reveal their Roma identity and may avoid volunteering information about their ethnicity when they have the option in formal surveys or studies.

The data available are often unreliable in countries that lack efficient, systematic data-gathering mechanisms. The lack of disaggregated data based on ethnicity further cripples policymaking.

THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS CAN HELP ACHIEVE GOAL 1:

- Governments should collaborate with the relevant bodies of the European Commission on legal and administrative measures to develop ethnic data collection methods in order to monitor the effects of policies on ethnic minorities, and take corrective action as required.

- Governments, while respecting data protection laws, should gather data on the education of Roma, including disaggregated data on enrolment, performance, and progression, and make this information public in a comprehensible, statistical format.

- The European Union should adopt measures to support the collection of comparable data that is disaggregated by ethnicity, respects individual privacy, and focuses on education and social inclusion issues.

- The Secretariat and Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion should initiate and endorse efforts to raise awareness among Roma about the value of participating in data collection that uses ethnic group categories to measure social inclusion.

2 Regularly review, improve, and implement policies and programmes for Roma.

All the countries monitored by OSI have adopted policies and programmes aimed at improving education for Roma. However, most of these programmes are riddled with systemic problems and often fail to specifically address the segregation of Roma in education; miss precise targets for indicators and monitoring mechanisms; employ outdated methods and data; and lack consistency in funding and implementation.

The continuing trend toward decentralisation of education policymaking in countries with large Roma populations has left central governments with fewer mechanisms to combat local segregationist practices that endure or emerge despite national-level commitments to desegregation.

THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS CAN HELP ACHIEVE GOAL 2:

■ Governments need to consider both Roma-specific and general education strategies to create a coherent policy for the education of Roma children that explicitly addresses Roma while remaining linked and relevant to existing strategies.

■ Governments should engage with civil society organisations in developing and implementing monitoring mechanisms that assess progress toward the Decade Action Plan goals in education; they should regularly issue public reports on progress in achieving Decade Action Plan goals.

■ The European Union should encourage all Decade countries to address Roma as a target group in their National Action Plans on Social Inclusion and Lifelong Learning and other relevant policy frameworks.

■ The Secretariat and Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion should support the involvement of Roma organisations to promote ethnic monitoring as a means to identify problems, advocate for targeted policies, and as follow-up to evaluate the impact of these policies.

■ The Secretariat and Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion should promote collaboration between national governments and civil society monitoring initiatives in implementing the Decade Action Plans for education, provide technical support to help governments develop strategies to create monitoring indicators and evaluation mechanisms, and exert pressure on governments to follow through with the implementation of these plans.

3 Confront and combat racism, prejudice, and discrimination against Roma children.

Prejudice against Roma schoolchildren is manifested in various ways. Teachers assume Roma cannot handle the mainstream curriculum, and entire communities resist integration and fight to preserve schools that are separate and unequal.

Surprisingly, not all of the countries with substantial Roma populations have comprehensive antidiscrimination laws or well-resourced, competent agencies to implement and enforce those laws.

A larger problem is that many Roma do not know enough about their rights and opportunities for protection. They fear possible negative consequences if they file a complaint, and they often do not trust official institutions to solve their problems. They may not recognise many discriminatory acts as discrimination or as a violation of their rights.

THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS CAN HELP ACHIEVE GOAL 3:

- Governments must establish and monitor equal treatment criteria to guarantee the enrolment of disadvantaged children and maintain integrated classes in school systems throughout the country.
- Governments should only allocate funds from the EU and the central budget to schools and authorities that accept and thoroughly implement integration and antidiscrimination measures.
- Governments should ensure funding for activities that raise awareness of mechanisms to prevent and address discrimination, particularly among minority communities.
- The EU should work with Decade countries to develop focused public awareness campaigns about the racism, social exclusion, and discrimination that Roma face.

4 Develop, improve, and implement desegregation policies.

Segregation of Roma children takes many forms in Europe. In some countries, Roma children are improperly placed into special schools for children with intellectual disabilities, when in fact they simply need assistance in overcoming language and cultural barriers.

A more subtle form of discrimination occurs when Roma children are placed into separate classrooms or entire schools to help them "catch up." Roma children's needs should be met within mainstream schools through adequate teacher training and effective bilingual education programmes.

Roma children may experience de facto segregation due to the isolated location of their communities. Some children in these areas simply do not go to school. Schools that do operate in majority Roma areas are almost always marked by fewer resources, crumbling facilities, and lower educational quality. Such schools also set Roma children back by isolating them from the national language and mainstream culture.

THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS CAN HELP ACHIEVE GOAL 4:

- Governments must take the necessary legal, financial, and administrative steps to end all forms of educational segregation of Roma children.

- Governments can reduce the number of Roma in special schools for children with intellectual disabilities by improving diagnostic and assessment tools used to evaluate children with special educational needs.

- Governments should ensure that mainstream primary schools are the first option for all children and provide the trained staff, bilingual programmes, and other benefits that special education programmes provide in order to guarantee access to quality education.

- The EU should adopt standards prohibiting ethnic and racial segregation in education; investigate the development of legal measures to enforce these standards; and provide formal monitoring through inspections and sanctions.

- The EU should examine how its policies and programming can address racial segregation in education and the widespread unequal and inadequate provision of services for Roma.

5 Strengthen Roma children's access to preschool.

Preschool offers vital preparation for Roma children by helping them learn the language of instruction if it is not what they speak at home, and by introducing them to the rhythms and routines of school.

Many Roma children, however, do not attend preschool and enter first grade without any preparation for their school experience. In some countries, there simply are not enough places for all children to attend preschool. In other countries, preschool is not part of compulsory education or poor families are unable to pay the requisite fees.

THE FOLLOWING ACTION CAN HELP ACHIEVE GOAL 5:

■ Governments should ensure that all children have access to preschool by adding facilities and classes as necessary to accommodate all children, and by eliminating or subsidising the school fees and transportation costs that exclude disadvantaged children.

"From the age of five it is obligatory to attend preschool. This one year is not enough time for a Roma child to catch up with a Hungarian child who started preschool at the age of three. In Roma families there are no bookshelves, no storybooks. I can argue with any Roma parent and prove that their children read very few storybooks. Roma children in Ónod rarely go to preschool. When they do, the atmosphere is strange and distressing for them."

President, Roma Minority Self-Government, Ónod, Hungary

6 Reduce the impact of poverty and bureaucracy on education for Roma.

Poverty prevents many Roma families from providing their children with basic necessities for school. Impoverished Roma parents unable to provide shoes or coats for their children often keep them home from school when the weather is bad. Cramped, poorly lit housing hinders the ability of children to do their homework.

When state support is available, it is often irregular or insufficient. In some countries, special schools recruit Roma and other poor students from mainstream schools by offering free meals and accommodation to keep enrolment high.

Standard requirements for enrolment in preschools and elementary schools often require documentation that can overwhelm Roma who have low literacy levels, who were never issued official or medical documents, or who have been displaced by conflict in countries such as Montenegro and Macedonia.

Roma in many countries live in marginalised settlements that are often illegal or unregulated and thus overlooked by official registries and school enrolment drives.

THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS CAN HELP ACHIEVE GOAL 6:

- Governments should work toward improving Roma access to personal documents and health care, which is crucial to increasing their access to education.

- Governments, where appropriate, should develop policies that will enable refugees, Roma, and other frequently marginalised groups to gain access to education when they have been displaced by conflict and may not have all the required documents for school enrolment.

7 Introduce child-centred teaching methods and offer teachers diversity training.

In the countries monitored, a majority of educators still use traditional teacher-focused techniques. Although official policies may require more interactive, child-centred methods, teachers have been slow to adopt these methods in the classroom.

Teachers are also often poorly prepared for working with diverse groups of children. Pedagogy departments are beginning to prepare teachers for multicultural classrooms, but there are significant discrepancies in how departments interpret this discipline.

Most countries still lack standardised requirements for teachers to regularly update their skills, including training in multiculturalism and working with minority communities such as Roma.

Beyond the classroom, school inspectors often have limited powers and lack a mandate to address the segregation of Roma or actively support desegregation.

THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS CAN HELP ACHIEVE GOAL 7:

- Governments should mandate diversity training for all educators with the aim of creating a school environment that respects and embraces the diversity of the student population.

- Governments should support in- and preservice teacher-training institutions to emphasise school-based leadership and management, student-centred instruction, methodologies for second language learning, antibias education, and parent and community involvement.

- Governments should attract qualified teachers to schools in lower socio-economic areas with incentives such as professional development opportunities.

- Governments should increase the number of Roma working in education by initiating or expanding programmes for Roma teachers and administrators.

- Governments in countries lacking national standards for grading and/or external evaluation mechanisms should ensure fair treatment for Roma schoolchildren by issuing criteria to help teachers avoid lowering expectations or inflating grades.

- Governments must create national standards linked to national-level assessment systems to generate statistics on student outcomes that are reliable, comparable, and based on information disaggregated for ethnicity.

8 Involve Roma parents and the community in education.

Roma parents rarely are included in school affairs, adding to the isolation and exclusion of Roma communities. Most of the countries studied offer few formal channels for parental and community engagement with the education system. School boards or councils exist in all countries, but do not necessarily guarantee or encourage meaningful parental or community involvement.

THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS CAN HELP ACHIEVE GOAL 8:

- Governments should encourage schools and school boards to strengthen links with Roma communities and promote community-based strategies to help minority groups participate in decision-making and the education process.

- The European Union should ensure that existing programmes such as the European Social Fund include plans to support the involvement of Roma teachers and administrators in developing education policy and programmes.

"I was a very good pupil, but my parents were very poor, and I had to give up my schooling when I finished the third grade. I don't want the same thing to happen to my daughter. The teacher told me she is a good student. She is now in the second grade, but I am also very poor, and I don't know when I will have an opportunity to educate her."

Parent, village of Balačko, Valjevo, Serbia

9 Establish teacher training and programmes in bilingual education.

Roma communities are diverse and may speak a Romanes dialect or another non-majority language as a first language. This situation causes an array of problems for Roma children when they enter school.

Language barriers are often used to justify the incorrect placement of Roma children in special schools or Roma-only classes. By not addressing language barriers within mainstream classrooms and preschools, schools are missing a major opportunity to promote integration, and instead help reinforce Roma children's sense of marginalisation.

Few Roma children are able to study Romanes, the Roma language, because it is not recognised as an official language in many countries. A number of countries are beginning to address language and cultural issues in mainstream classrooms by using Roma teaching assistants. Existing teaching assistant projects have helped local integration efforts, but the level of commitment and ability to meet the demand for assistants varies from country to country.

THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS CAN HELP ACHIEVE GOAL 9:

- Governments should ensure that Roma children whose first language is not the language of instruction receive assistance by supporting in- and preservice teacher training courses in language acquisition, bilingual education methodology, and the teaching of Romanes.

- Governments should develop preschool programmes that place particular emphasis on language acquisition and bilingual techniques.

- Governments should ensure systematic solutions for the professional engagement of Roma teaching assistants, and find incentives and positive discrimination measures to include more Roma in the training and education necessary for this job.

10 Integrate diversity and Roma culture into the curriculum for all children.

School curricula that present cultural and ethnic diversity in unbiased ways are an opportunity to promote tolerance. While a handful of books in the countries studied mention Roma, their depictions are often distorted and stereotypical, and there are very few attempts to deal with the broader concepts of multiculturalism or diversity.

Advocates and officials have made efforts to increase the available curricular material related to Roma, but current approaches frequently take too narrow a view by only offering these materials to Roma when in fact all children should be learning about diversity.

THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS CAN HELP ACHIEVE GOAL 10:

- Governments should consult with Roma communities during the development of school curricula.
- Governments should develop textbook and curriculum criteria that require the inclusion of Roma culture, language, and history, as well as cultural and ethnic diversity issues in textbooks and other educational materials.

Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma

The *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma* monitoring report series focuses on eight countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015.

The series was produced by the Open Society Institute's EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) in cooperation with the Education Support Program and the Roma Initiatives programme.

Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma includes individual country reports and a regional overview. Each report contains an in-depth analysis of the specific situation in the country, case studies conducted in three locations, and a list of concrete, specific, and constructive recommendations.

Local teams of experts, including a research reporter, an education specialist, and researchers drawn from Roma civil society, drafted the monitoring reports. EUMAP convened national roundtables to focus on a draft version of each report, giving all stakeholders an opportunity to critique and comment on it. Final reports were also published in translation and publicly presented in all the countries covered in the monitoring.

The reports are available online in both English and the local language. To download them and find more information about EUMAP's work on Roma, including the methodology and other materials used for this project, please see www.eumap.org/topics/romaed.

To receive printed copies of *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma*, please complete the order form at www.eumap.org/puborder or send an email to eumap@osi.hu specifying the reports you are interested in, and your full postal address.

For further information, contact EUMAP at eumap@osi.hu or Miriam Anati, Advocacy and Communications, EUMAP, at manati@osieurope.org.

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

The Open Society Institute works to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. To achieve its mission, OSI seeks to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to advance justice, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI builds alliances across borders and continents on issues such as corruption and freedom of information. OSI places a high priority on protecting and improving the lives of people in marginalised communities.

Investor and philanthropist George Soros in 1993 created OSI as a private operating and grantmaking foundation to support his foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Those foundations were established, starting in 1984, to help countries make the transition from communism. OSI has expanded the activities of the Soros foundations network to encompass the United States and more than 60 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Each Soros foundation relies on the expertise of boards composed of eminent citizens who determine individual agendas based on local priorities.

EU MONITORING AND ADVOCACY PROGRAM (EUMAP)

The EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the Open Society Institute monitors the development of human rights and rule of law standards and policies in the European Union and in its candidate and potential candidate countries. EUMAP has published monitoring reports highlighting specific areas in which state performance conforms to, or falls short of, broadly accepted international standards. These reports also examine ways in which EU standards or policy could be clarified or further articulated. EUMAP approaches monitoring as a crucial tool to encourage a continuous review of policies, and to contribute to improving standards and policies where needed. EUMAP has carried out monitoring in more than 20 European countries both in Western and Eastern Europe as well as in South Eastern Europe and Turkey.

EDUCATION SUPPORT PROGRAM

The mission of the Open Society Institute's Education Support Program is to promote justice in education by strengthening advocacy, innovation, and activism to combat social exclusion, expand openness and accountability in education systems and education reforms, and promote open society values in education.

The Education Support Program and its network partners support education reform in countries in transition, combining best practice and policy to strengthen open society values. ESP works to facilitate change in education and national policy development. Support is focused in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Europe, the Middle East, Russia, South Asia, and Africa.

ROMA INITIATIVES

Roma Initiatives builds upon the Open Society Institute's 15 years of support for Roma communities to challenge prejudice and discrimination and to pursue policy change. With the launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005, Roma Initiatives has guided all OSI programmatic and grantmaking activity related to the Decade with the goal of achieving four objectives: to increase the capacity of Roma to act for themselves and effectively participate in public life; to advocate for systemic change in policies affecting Roma at the local, national, and EU levels; to challenge negative images and stereotyping of Roma; and to pursue measures to make the Decade an enduring and effective success.

Roma Initiatives provides institutional support grants to Roma civic organisations, funds training and internship schemes for young Roma, and supports efforts by Roma women to challenge gender discrimination and increase their participation in politics and society.

The estimated 10 million Roma across Europe make up the continent's largest minority and one of its most vulnerable groups. Roma represent an increasingly large proportion of school-age children in Europe, and education is the key to securing their social inclusion. The Open Society Institute's monitoring of access to quality education for Roma in eight countries pinpoints 10 fundamental goals in education that can help secure a bright future for all children in Europe.

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE