



SUCCESS STORY

Improving Education for Roma Students

Scholarships, tutoring and teacher training help Roma students from pre-school to university



Photo: USAID/Lynn Abbott

Roma students attend a tutoring program at one of five USAID-funded education centers in Macedonia.

“Without the preschool help, many of the kids have no chance to compete with Macedonian students,” said Ramis Osmanovski, director of the Kumanovo center.

While most of Macedonia’s Roma children start the first grade, only half of them finish 8th grade, and a mere third of those go on to 9th grade. Only 5 percent of all Roma — or “gypsy” — students ever make it to a university.

Since July 2004, USAID has been working to improve this situation, supporting programs for Roma students that span from preschool to university.

Because most Roma children lag behind their peers in Macedonian language skills, the early levels of education are critical. Tutors at five USAID-funded centers throughout the country help children from pre-school to 8th grade with homework and studying. At the Kumanovo center, most of the 240 children are in primary school — and are getting help catching up with other students so they stay in school.

“Without the pre-school help, many of the kids have no chance to compete with Macedonian students,” said Ramis Osmanovski, director of the Kumanovo center. “We also work with the parents, because many of them are not motivated, and that has an effect on the children.”

The centers keep in contact with local school administrators, psychologists and social workers to better track attendance and ensure that students have a home environment where they can do homework and get help with their studies.

USAID is also working to help better integrate Roma children into seven primary schools, where 300 teachers and administrators are being taught to change their prejudices about the Roma.

To encourage Roma secondary and university students of Roma background to stay in school, USAID is also supporting tutors and a scholarship program. In December 2004, USAID began distributing \$600 in scholarship funds per school year to 280 high-school freshmen. And every Roma freshman that enrolls in Macedonia’s three state universities — currently about 50 students — receive scholarships of \$100 a month while they remain in school.