

FINAL REPORT  
(Project Period: December 30, 2001 - September 30, 2002)

Project name: “Stimulating Integration of Roma Children and Roma Pre-school Organizations into Local Community”

Recipient organization: Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade

Date of report: October 18, 2002

Question: “Do you like to visit our friends from another (state) kindergarten ?”

Three Roma boys said:

- Their teachers are really pretty. They put a lot of make-up.  
(5 years)
- It's great down there. There are no many toys, but there are good girls and boys. They really love us.  
(6 years)
- I would like to make some fight there but I feel ashamed. (4.5 years)

“My Friends and I”, Kragujevac, 2002

“Stimulating Integration of Roma Children and Roma Pre-school Organisations into Local Community” has been 1st project in our country that made joint Roma and non-Roma children and Roma and non-Roma organisations within concrete activities. The Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade, in position of implementing partner of the Royal Netherlands Embassy, had written up the call for proposals in November 2001 and invited Roma pre-school organisations to apply only if led by efforts to build up real partnership with non-Roma (pre-) school organisations. The aim was to bring together Roma and non-Roma children to work together and stimulate enrolment of Roma children in school process in September 2002. Sensitisation of 1st class primary school teachers on Roma issue where newcomers gravitated to was another settled goal. Monitoring and evaluation results showed these goals were achieved.

For the 1st time one project was managed and implemented by the team of 3 NGOs that are Roma and non-Roma, too. Partner organisations have been Roma Women's Center “Bibija”, Team “Psycho code” and Incest Trauma Center. We tried to serve as a role model for others involved in this project.

Project was implemented on several levels:

- 1a. Assessment of present needs among Roma pre-school organizations.
  - 1b. Writing up the call for proposals and making it public.
  - 1c. Selecting submitted proposals in accordance with given guidelines and supporting 4 subprojects (applied 13).
2. Capacity building trainings for 26 teachers from Roma pre-school organizations. Duration: 6 days in total. Themes covering the areas:

- Developmental issues in children (taking care of specifics of Roma population).
- Child survivors of abuse (emotional, physical and focus on sexual abuse).
- Diversity issues and discrimination.

### 3. Monitoring of supported subprojects:

- Covered 131 children of age 5-8 (local and IRL) and 82 parents.
- 46 children in total from these projects enrolled into regular school process in school year 2002 / 2003.
- 3 subprojects completed successfully their pre-school preparation activities: "Blue Rabbit" within Humanitarian Association "New Road" from Kragujevac, "KUD Rumunka" from Backi Monostor and "Association for Development of Romany Communities" from Belgrade.

4. Sensitising schoolteachers on Roma issue (44 teachers that did welcome newcomers in September 2002 completed our trainings). Trainings held in Belgrade and Kragujevac. Obtained permission by the Ministry of Education. Being encouraged by the Ministry to ask afterwards for official accreditation of this program, so to be included in curriculum regarding improvement of professional skills of school staff.

5. Printing of 1000 picture books for Roma children meant as mini prevention tool against sexual abuse. This is 1st picture book of this kind in Yugoslavia. Distribution in person to Roma children within Roma pre-school organisations and Roma settlements. Mini-promotions within Roma settlements.

6. Evaluation done together with colleagues from subprojects and making closure by joint press conference.

Detailed description of completed levels (related to the plans described in the starting project frame):

#### Level 1:

Circling questionnaire to numerous Roma pre-school organizations that aimed to assess their present capacity and needs (appendix 1) gave the quick insight plus partner organizations involved in management of this project relied on its significant experience regarding Roma issue. We saw that current repeated needs of organizations had been related to additional educational programs and didactic games. That's why we decided to include it as the project offer (level 2: capacity building trainings) apart from the requirements of the call for proposal. On the ground of its previous experience, our partner organizations (Roma Women's Center "Bibija", Team "Psycho code" and ITCenter) defined requirements for the call for proposal (appendix 2).

#### Requirements as following:

- MUST work on integration,
- Children of age 5-8 as the target group that would join school preparation (in order to include the ones who were late for earlier school years),
- Structure of Roma children: local and internally displaced children (from Kosovo),
- Concrete subprojects' activities MUST include jointly both Roma and non-Roma children.
- MUST include parents in planned activities in order to assure their consent and participation in stimulating enrolment into a school process in September 2002.
- To put the special attention on gender issue (both working with children and parents).
- Roma pre-school organizations MUST work jointly with other state pre-school organizations (kindergartens) or schools where children gravitate.
- Roma pre-school organizations having Roma staff will have the priority when selection of proposals takes place.
- Duration of activities: max. 6 months.
- Grant was up to 7.500,00 DEM (exchanged in EUR).

"Blue Rabbit" within Humanitarian Association "New Road" from Kragujevac, "KUD Rumunka" from Backi Monostor, "Association for Development of Romany Communities" from Belgrade and 'Cultural

Center of Roma” from Subotica were selected in November 2001. The last one (from Subotica) carried out activities not in relation with the plans described in starting subproject frame, so it was terminated from the process as a whole.

#### Level 2:

26 female staff members from Roma kindergartens went through 6-days-training that was carried out by Team “Psycho code” and ITCenter. We spoke on developmental issues in children and kept a good eye on specifics of living conditions, tradition of Roma population and also social distance and discrimination they suffer by majority, so this all influences how much included Roma children are in the school process as well as how much successful they are. Structure of the group is important for the fact that all participants were very open, co-operative and highly motivated, they had at least secondary school educational level and sufficient experience in working directly with children as well as in attending trainings of this kind and implementing method of workshops in their own daily work, so it was an easy task to build up new skills further. Trainers were Ms Duska Jovanovic, Ms Marija Krivacic, Mr Dragan Stojanovic and Ms Irena Lobodok - Stulic (plus their two associates working in private kindergartens). (Report on training on developmental issues made by Psycho code can be found as Appendix 3.)

Teaching on issues on trauma and abuse in children by ITCenter (Ms Ljiljana Bogavac and Ms Dusica Popadic) provided basic terminology in the area of abuse, forms of violence, many practical activities to use as prevention when working with children, what to do when disclosure of abuse happens, what resources to use to assure adequate assistance to child survivor (police, school, health and legal services, social work centers, NGOs..).

Teaching on diversity issues and discrimination by ITCenter provided basic terms regarding dynamics of oppression as well as offered full recognition for discrimination that Roma population is exposed to in our society. We spoke on certain exercises that can be practiced with children (“wall of prejudices” and “bridge of communication”) and how to react toward parents when anything noticed at the child. We stimulated reporting cases of discrimination to officials. (Manual designed by ITCenter and used during training enclosed as Appendix 4.)

Certificates (Appendices 5 and 6) were issued to all the participants after successful completing the whole training period.

#### Level 3:

‘Non-threatening monitoring’ was at the final evaluation named our assistance to subprojects along the project period. Colleagues from subprojects gave us a feedback that it was good timing of introductory training in January because it enabled getting to know each other as practitioners, which made easier latter contact. As a team (Ms Ljiljana Bogavac from ITCenter, Ms Marija Krivacic from Psycho code and Ms Slavica Vasic from “Bibija”) we made monthly visitations to subprojects located in Kragujevac, Backi Monostor and Belgrade (city garbage dump - Deponija). Our trial was to provide continual consultations and advising by using our own experience in working in Roma settlements and expertise. We appreciated openness of staff from local projects as well as their workshops’ child and adult participants sincere involvement. When visiting certain subproject, we acted mainly as participants and had a lot of pleasure to be a part of it (e.g. being a guest on Bajram in one Roma family - scene that was improvised during workshop).

131 children and 82 parents took part in the programs of our subprojects.

Within all the programs it was taken care of use of both languages (Roma and Serbian) through casual communication and learning many games (competitive and co-operative) in both.

In Kragujevac, “Blue Rabbit” (within the Humanitarian Association “New Road”) completed various workshops: cognitive, mental hygiene, prevention of violence. All the sessions (around 100 for children) were implemented in co-operation with state kindergarten “Lane”. 1/5 included both Roma and non-Roma children and these were held in premises of both kindergartens. (“Improving interethnic, intercultural, religious and many other diversities...” V. Miletic, State kindergarten “Lane” Manager). Many dilemmas on how to

approach preparation for the first joint session (to inform children of both kindergartens who the visitors are, about the purpose and the goal of the visit ?!) were the themes also while evaluation process. Objectives of integration like: to develop child's ability to understand diversities among people and develop willingness to respect them, to increase self-respect and feeling of personal and group identity, to improve communication and co-operation skills and learn on constructive conflict resolution, to get familiar with CRC and the right of the child to live without violence. Staff at this project approached workshops by being convinced that the key to mutual understanding and communication is having children active and equal with workshop leaders. Important advantage in Kragujevac subproject was related to the fact that transport for children during complete project period had been provided.

For adults were carried out workshops on legal counselling in cases of gender-based violence (legal regulations, prevention measures and institutions women can address when in need) and put an emphasise on strategies against racial discrimination that follows when asking for help in official institutions. It's important awareness while these sessions had been going on that many included themes (depending on how the workshop is led) may reinforce patriarchal model of women's responsibility only or put extra responsibility for repetition of inherited patterns on women's shoulder. Outreach work through permanent home visitations was there, too.

Precious example of good practice within this project was around organizing mini-campaign at the beginning and mobilizing local media to promote the idea of integration (distributing caps and t-shirts with slogan to children followed by TV). Thanks to this step that had made best intentions of "Blue Rabbit" public, hard times were made for anyone who was hesitant to co-operate. As a result, for the first time in their long-term experience, General Manager of state kindergartens in Kragujevac visited Roma kindergarten "Blue Rabbit". (Reports enclosed as Appendix 7).

#### In Backi Monostor

KUD "Rumunka" with its subproject enabled impressive mixture of child and adult participants. This wasn't only integration of Roma and non-Roma children and parents, but joint workshops for Roma (orthodox and catholic), Croats and Serbian children and parents. Of course, this is saying something about geographical profile of this part of Vojvodina, but also about serious investment of colleagues from this project. So, at the same place there were children: Renata, Josip, Dejan, Valdina, Stipan, Elena and they all enjoyed meeting and doing activities together. This project made a big success by starting up mothers' group and this is very much worthwhile further to develop. It might be good to use assistance of Roma Women's Center "Bibija". (Reports enclosed as Appendix 8)

#### In Belgrade (Deponija)

Around 50 sessions on art, drama and music for children were held in city garbage dump (Deponija) by staff from "Association for Development of Romany Communities". Very good emphasise on dramatization of family images and customs was made (new baby in the house, welcoming a guest, celebration of Bajram, etc.) that had direct effect on strengthening self-confidence and self-respect in children. Parents took part in these role-plays, too, and agreed on future joint efforts in collecting Roma stories and fairytales. At the same time, issue of thin boundary between recognition of Roma culture and tradition and reinforcement of early parentification and patriarchal parents (e.g. role playing preparation of the bride and wedding scene) appeared and it was a theme to be taken special care about. Co-operation with school where children gravitated started up lively during project period. Age-appropriate poems and stories were presented and analysed in both languages, Roma and Serbian (e.g. "Grandpa and the Turnip") as well as competent interpreting of ground workshop rules by Roma children to hosts-children at school. Established relationship between subproject staff and school staff is another good effect of this program. Activities such as creating newsletter "AVA KARI" stimulated positive self-image and self-affirmation (Appendix 9). Difficulties appeared in number of children (too many interested in attending workshops, wide age-range), so it asked for extra structuring. Apart from this, there was a wish to include more parents.

This subproject was presented in Educational Bulletin (official newsletter for educational institutions in

Serbia), on RTV Serbia (2. channel, "A Voice of Reason"), Radio Studio B ("Words and Images") and video reportage was aired on Teachers' Faculty for one week in April (made by students from the same faculty). (Reports enclosed as Appendix 10)

#### Level 4:

44 1st class primary school teachers (mainly teachers plus some pedagogues, psychologists...) who did welcome Roma children as newcomers in September 2002 at their schools got certificates for successful completing of our training program (Appendices 16 and 17). Program agenda (Appendix 14) included joint work of trainers and trainees to list the causes for insufficient school success of Roma children, speaking on diversity issues and discrimination of Roma children, listing difficulties on the side of teachers and accomplishments in working with Roma children, exchange of ideas in stimulating intellectual and social development of Roma children (experiences of Roma kindergartens in preparation process for school should be made visible to school teachers who will take over children by the beginning of the school year).

Articles written by Ms Slavica Vasic (Roma Women's Center "Bibija") and by Ms Suncica Macura - Milovanovic (Association for Development of Romany Communities) that give some of the potential answers on causes for insufficient school success of Roma children are enclosed (Appendices 12 and 13).

Listed causes by Ms Macura - Milovanovic are:

- Second language - not understanding the contents of lessons.
- Growing up in ghetto - different life experience and pre-school knowledge.
- No participation in the pre-school educational system - not being prepared for school.
- Lack of assistance in studying.
- Houses made of carton - lack of the basic studying conditions.
- Behaviour caused by poverty - child participation in earning.
- Lack of self-confidence - poor self-image.
- Real or pseudo-retardation of Roma children.

Each training was led by trainers' team (one person from each partner organization that managed this project: Roma Women's Center "Bibija", Team Psycho code and ITCenter, plus depending on the place where training was held, our colleagues from related project were present to share their experiences from pre-school preparation done with Roma children. Roma Women's Center together with Mr Tanasije Mirijevski (Association of Roma, Zvezdara) were in charge of bringing near culture and tradition of Roma, the Team "Psycho code" (Ms Slavica Kijevcanin) worked on methodology and didactics and ITCenter (Ms Ljiljana Bogavac) worked on diversity issues and discrimination. Co-ordination of this level was done by Ms Irena Lobodok - Stulic from the Team "Psycho code" (reports enclosed as Appendix 11).

Participants expressed high level of satisfaction and personal gain in terms of getting new knowledge and ideas, feeling content about sharing experiences vs. feeling lonely in own, isolated efforts ("I heard experience of others and that broadened my perspective...", "...exchange of experiences opened up new possibilities of establishing closer contact with parents and gaining their trust".)

Participants showed interest in: 1. getting to know more about Roma culture and Roma language, 2. further thinking on strategies to approach Roma family, 3. defining educational standards regarding Roma children by taking into consideration living conditions and other causes for insufficient school success, 4. intensifying co-operation with schools that had no answered invitation to join these trainings, 5. revision of meetings (completed trainings) a while later, etc.

Evaluation questionnaires filled by participants showed very good results. On the scale from 1 to 7, this program was ranked in the following way: Belgrade (June 19, 2002) - 6.2, Kragujevac (September 12, 2002) - 6.4 and Belgrade (September 13, 2002) - 5.9. (Evaluation form as Appendix 15).

#### Level 5:

Children's picture book that was published within this project is the first of this kind in our country (Appendix 18). Translation was done from Dutch language, originally this book had been written by French author.

It aims to warn on risk of childhood sexual abuse and feelings that follow as well as to speak on key role of adults who should take supportive role and to point out potential reactions of peer group, the learning process expected from the school system on this issue. It speaks both on cases when offender might be family or non-family member. It is the book to be read by parents / caretakers and children together and it provides information on which to report when such experience or suspected situation occurs (ITCenter and Sex Offences Police Department - Belgrade level).

We already organized mini-promotions of this book in official premises (hotel "Kasina" in Belgrade, Appendix 19) for our colleagues from Roma kindergartens who had attended trainings. Promotion gave a couple of useful hints how to read the book together with children and to take care of adaptation of language, of explanation of 'strange words' like sexual aggression or exhibitionism, how to act when the child discloses abusive experience of either her/his own or of the other child, how to deal with your own feelings as a professional. The idea is that, after such recommendations, training participants may be more equipped to present the content to children in their kindergartens, using these hints together with knowledge they got during the training itself. Promotion was done by Ms Ljiljana Bogavac (ITCenter), Ms Slavica Vasic (Roma Women's Center "Bibija") and Ms Milena Zivanovic (Sex Offences Police Department - Belgrade level).

Mainly, ITCenter introduced the book to children in Roma settlements directly (village Rakovica, Orlovsko settlement...) and these visitations to different settlements will continue after the project period expires. Our main aim is to complete hand delivery of this picture book to all the children included.

#### Level 6:

Evaluation at the end of the project period (done through open discussion of organizations that managed project and implemented subprojects) showed the following results:

- Project participants do carry now a good experience in promoting integration model of Roma children into a local community. Therefore, they are able to give specific contribution when future strategic planning of their own programs as well as when influencing future trends of policy makers.
- Awareness of necessity to plan gradually steps of integration model (e.g. how to involve parents of non-Roma children).
- Roma pre-school organizations understand and promote better the principle of child participation.
- Example of good practice in involving local media and using them to make a bridge to state kindergartens or to schools.
- Precious example of mixture of workshops' child and adult participants of different nationalities and religions in Backi Monostor (Vojvodina).
- Local Roma kindergartens note good practices in using our organizations as a bridge to school staff in their local communities (using our 'near and distant position' at the same time to open up new issues and being aware to act in the best interest of local organization).
- Female staff of Roma kindergartens strengthened their own position within their organization through capacity building activities of this project. Another good effect is that within subprojects, female professionals were economically empowered in their positions.
- Open possibility to start up women's programs within Roma kindergartens with assistance of Roma Women's Center "Bibija" (important to learn more from "Bibija" how to attract women / mothers).
- Open possibility to build on knowledge on gender-based violence and to learn from Network of Trust to Fight GBV (GO and NGOs co-ordinated by the ITCenter) with long-term experience in this field.
- This project is an example of good practice in building up partnership and using assistance of the organization(s) in charge for monitoring, rather than perceiving them as some kind of 'controller'.
- Ministry of Education recognized our offer for school staff as valuable and supported realization of this project level.
- Schoolteachers who completed sensitising program on Roma issue expressed willingness to continue working on this theme.
- Important to include in such sensitising programs: 1. school professionals who are in charge of testing children who often incorrectly categorize Roma children as retarded and refer them to 'special' schools', 2. school professionals working in 'special' schools.

- Open possibility to apply for accreditation of the program for sensitising schoolteachers at the Ministry of Education (ongoing call for proposals within Improvement of Professional Skills Program).
- Roma pre-school organizations are after giving its contribution to this project more concurrent when applying for new grants.

#### Bottlenecks and/or problems:

- Ministry of Education answered our request to get permission to work with school teachers in June 2001 (submitted on two occasions, in February and repeated in April.) Therefore, instead of visiting different towns in Serbia where pre-school organizations are settled and giving trainings directly to each related school (as described in starting project proposal), we summed up teachers and other school professionals into 3 groups (2 in Belgrade and 1 in Kragujevac) and completed this level of project. Discrepancy in number of school staff planned and realized is to be covered by follow-up activities (pls. look below).
- Subproject of "Cultural Center of Roma" from Subotica was after 1.5 month stopped because of budget misuse. In agreement with the Embassy's staff, the rest of their budget redistributed throughout other project activities.

#### Follow-up:

- Subproject of "Association for Development of Romany Communities" has got opportunity by the Ministry of Education to carry out two similar trainings at schools at the end of September, so we are glad that the idea started up within our partnership will be made possible to live on.
- Roma Women's Center "Bibija" in partnership with the Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade will apply to the Ministry of Education to obtain accreditation for program of sensitising schoolteachers' on Roma issue.
- Mini-promotions of picture book continue from one settlement to another. Distribution by Roma Women's Center "Bibija" and promotions by Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade (reading this book together with groups of children, age 4-12).
- Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade will continually include teachers from Roma pre-school organizations in its future programs.

#### Suggestions for the future / lessons learned:

- Experiences of Roma kindergartens in preparation process for school should be made visible to school teachers who will take over children by the beginning of the school year).
- Educating media and strategic planning of using them in a good way when developing programs.
- Must be done gradual and constant motivating and stimulating Roma population itself to enter integration (within this issue should be especially worked with Roma NGOs and their responsibility in this process).
- Joint evaluation process by the end of this project worked as a good model to prepare and do the press conference (Appendix 20) with colleagues from subprojects that spoke from perspective of direct work with children. In that way, press conference made a good 'closing ritual' for all involved.
- Introducing regular supervision sessions of the content by trusted colleague(s) / practitioner(s) would be of great assistance for subprojects' staff.
- Full respecting autonomy of organizations that carried out subprojects is the only way for real partnership.

Sincerely,

Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade Director

Dusica Popadic