

**From Slide 1 to 5 presents Mrs. Rodica Bruss – project manager, representative of the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports**

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Good afternoon, Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity I have to briefly present the project „All in kindergarten, All in first grade”, a strategic project running now at the national level. My name is Rodica Bruss and I am here together with my colleague Marian Daragiu to present the stage, the challenges and the perspectives of this project.

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The project „All in kindergarten, All in first grade” answers the Key Area of Intervention „Preventing and correcting early school leaving”, within the Priority Axis 2 „Linking life long learning and labour market” and is funded by the European Union through the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

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The Romanian Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports expresses through this project its special concern and interest towards maintaining the continuous development of a quality educational process for children in general and particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, in our case Roma children.

Ensuring equity in education is a constant priority of the Ministry of Education. In order to implement mechanisms designed to improve access to education, the Ministry initiated the Phare Program Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups in the period 2003-2007, aiming to ensure equal opportunities and to protect the fundamental rights of the child.

The current project is complementary to the activities carried out before, scaling-up best practices validated until the present, such as: Summer Kindergartens, Basic clothing and school supplies kits, Trainings of the school staff on topics correlated with empirical realities of the Roma communities, Parents School aiming to transform parents in educational partners of the school, Afterschool programs.

In the late stage public education policies will be drafted based on the outcomes validated through the project implementation and will be promoted at the level of decision-makers.

The project is implemented in partnership with Ruhama Foundation from Oradea, a nongovernmental organization well known and appreciated at national and European level in regards of their work with vulnerable groups. Last year, Ruhama Foundation won the title Organization of the Year in Romania within the Education Awards Gala.

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The Ministry of Education involved in the implementation of the project all 42 School Inspectorates, coordoning the local team activating in over 420 locations across the country to prevent and correct early school leaving among the little pupils.

To further present the specific objectives and outcomes of the project, I introduce you my colleague Marian Daragiu, the technical coordinator of the project.

**From Slide 5 to slide 9 presents Mr. Marian Daragiu – project team leader, Chairman of Ruhama Foundation, partner organization in the project**

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Thank you. Starting with 2006, with financial support from Roma Education Fund, Budapest, Ruhama Foundation initiated and piloted a series of alternative educational programs at the level of Bihor County, in 23 disadvantaged Roma communities, involving over 5.000 children and their parents. Comparing to the situation of four years ago, when a considerable number of children aged 5 to 8 years old neither had birth certificates, nor had attended public kindergarten, having very few chances to be integrated in public educational system, today over 1000 of these children are enrolled in primary school and their parents are supportive and actively involved in this regard. On the way, we generated a series of educational methodologies such as Summer Kindergarten, Parents School, Afterschool, Summer School, basic clothing vouchers for children enrolled in first grade, case management for families in difficulty and others.

The echo and the outcomes of the program reached the level of the Ministry of Education and together we elaborated the project „All in kindergarten, all in first grade”, a daring project, with an extended approach regarding not only its geographic coverage – meaning 420 communities – or the number of children – 8400 children involved, but especially regarding the advocacy for educational public policies adapted to the empirical reality of the majority of disadvantaged communities in Romania and specifically those communities predominantly populated by Roma citizens.

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To return to the „All in kindergarten, all in first grade” project, the main specific objectives of the project aim:

- To facilitate access to preschool and primary education for 8.400 children from disadvantaged communities, mainly Roma ethnics, by participating in educational programs such as “Summer Kindergarten” and “Afterschool”;
- To build up basic competences and skills of target children by developing a proper curriculum, including didactic materials, for the alternative programs implemented;
- To decrease the risk of early school leaving among target children by carrying out information and counselling activities addressed to their parents (“Parents School”);
- To increase the efficiency of the proposed education programs through specific professional training of the personnel involved in their implementation, counting over 2.100 resource people;
- To analyze the consequences of the implementation of flexible education programs for children from the target group by conducting a systemic study of the obtained outcomes;
- To increase the awareness among the target communities’ members on the issue of early school leaving risk for children, through specific information channels.

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As for the outcomes of the project, part of them had been accomplished, while others are foreseen in the near future.

- Over 8.500 children with early school leaving risk, mainly children from rural areas, Roma communities had participated in the 430 Summer Kindergartens organized at the national scale;
- 6.000 pupils with early school leaving risk, mainly children from rural areas, Roma communities will participate in the Afterschool program at a national scale, on the period of first grade;
- 2.100 personnel are being trained and involved in the implementation of the alternative education programs: Summer Kindergartens, Afterschools, Parents Schools; part of the trainings have already taken place in Oradea, Sinaia and, through the local teams, in each of the 42 County School Inspectorates;
- 10.000 parents / tutors of pupils with early school leaving risk, mainly children from rural areas, Roma communities, benefit of information and counselling on child education;
- 5.000 parents / tutors of pupils with early school leaving risk, mainly children from rural areas, Roma communities, participants in the Parents School program;
- 8.000 children from disadvantaged communities / families benefit of subsidies consisting of basic clothing kits in order to enrol in 1<sup>st</sup> grade – composed of seasonal clothing and shoes (sport outfit, shoes, sweater, jacket, boots, hat, gloves, underwear); during Summer Kindergarten, as well as in Afterschool, during the educational year children benefit of daily hot meals. Nevertheless, there are also some isolated localities for which providers can only assure cold food.
- 420 representatives of the disadvantaged communities – the community promoters – trained and activated for the community development process;
- The educational kit for preschool preparation named FROM HERE... TO 1<sup>st</sup> GRADE, containing the Handbook for 23 days of preschool preparation and the due didactic materials and the Educator's Guide for the Summer Kindergarten teachers has been elaborated and used in the 430 Summer Kindergartens;
- A sociological study upon the results obtained through implementing the flexible education programs for children and parents will be elaborated, useful to substantiate new educational policies in the field

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- Towards the end of this project, consequently to a critical analysis upon the activities carried out, we will elaborate 2 legislative proposals to substantiate educational policies based on the educational realities experienced in the project;
- We plan to increase the number of school-age children enrolled in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, coming from the 420 disadvantaged communities with 10%;
- To decrease the school leaving ratio among children in first grade from the 420 disadvantaged communities with 75%;
- To increase the awareness rate among disadvantaged families, especially Roma families, regarding the importance of child education and parent involvement in supporting their children;
- To increase the cohort of first grade-pupils coming from disadvantaged communities maintained in the education system with 20%;

- To increase the preschool preparation level of children from disadvantaged communities with 40% to facilitate scholar integration;
- As well as to establish the National Network of School Teachers for Inclusive Education, as professional network and platform for specific training and exchange of best practices.

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Thank you for your attention.