This chapter highlights different initiatives seeking to improve pre-school attendance and quality for Roma in the five countries.\textsuperscript{30} The intent is not to be comprehensive – an impossibility with the limited information available – or to highlight projects which have been subject to a rigorous impact evaluation – also an impossibility because these do not yet exist - but rather to provide an overview of the different types of initiatives being undertaken, and to highlight some relevant experiences elsewhere in the world to expand preschool. Recall that the regional Roma survey (2011) points to three areas that are likely to have the greatest impact on boosting enrolment: (1) better informing Roma parents about the returns to pre-school; (2) providing parents with incentives such as financial incentives and/or clothes, food, and transport (possibly conditional on enrolment/attendance) that lower the direct or indirect cost of preschool as well as providing information about existing government schemes that parents may be entitled too; and, (3) efforts to create a bridge through mediation between service providers and Roma parents; i.e. making the preschools more welcoming to Roma families and actively reaching out to parents and children. Initiatives seeking to expand preschool services will be covered since higher demand for preschool will require more preschool spaces to become available; the Hungary experience has shown that this can be a constraint when enrolment rates rise.

INFORMATION AND BRIDGING PROGRAMS THROUGH ACTIVE OUTREACH

There are several initiatives that seek to inform Roma parents of the benefits of pre-school. For example, the EC Roma Pilots “A Good Start” (AGS) initiative by the Roma Education Fund (REF)\textsuperscript{31} as well as the Slovak project within the Roma Education Initiative, include components focusing on information campaigns among Roma communities. A project in Bulgaria, “Effective approaches for encouraging early childhood education in high-risk communities” launched by the NGO A World Without Boarders employs an innovative strategy - “POL” (popular opinion leaders), which makes use of the influence of the informal community leaders in popularizing pre-school among Roma. The Roma-Lom project in Bulgaria include lobbying and advocacy through the organization of public forums, publishing articles in regional and local media. On a nation-wide scale, the Bulgarian government has provided funding to awareness-raising projects through the program “Educational Integration of children and pupils from the Roma community,” co-funded by the REF.

Two rigorous experimental studies found that informing families about the returns of education increased student enrolment in the Dominican Republic and Madagascar (Jensen 2007; Nguyen 2008). Because

\textsuperscript{30} Unless otherwise noted, Romania specific information comes from a World Bank organized workshop on ECD for Roma organized in Bucharest in March 2011 and sponsored by DG Regional Policy.

\textsuperscript{31} More information on this initiative can be found online at http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/good-start-eu-roma-pilot
providing information is cheap, these were highly cost-effective ways of increasing school participation in contexts where most families underestimate the benefits of going to school.\(^\text{32}\)

The regional Roma survey (2011) suggests that an important vehicle through which to disseminate messages about the value of pre-school education are doctors, nurses, or health workers. As shown in Table 19, in all five countries, children’s caregivers reported that when they have questions about the development of their child, they mostly rely on health workers, including community health workers. As such, governments and NGOs should consider more explicitly including this group of professionals in reaching out to Roma parents on the importance of pre-school education.

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Parents’ Sources of Information About Their Child’s Development}
\begin{tabular}{l|cccc}
\hline
 & Bulgaria & Czech Republic & Hungary & Romania & Slovakia \\
\hline
Doctor / nurse / health worker & 86 & 85 & 64 & 71 & 71 \\
Teacher & 62 & 72 & 15 & 41 & 41 \\
Social worker / community health worker & 24 & 46 & 4 & 30 & 33 \\
Family member & 38 & 79 & 73 & 65 & 64 \\
Friend / neighbor & 31 & 65 & 29 & 50 & 36 \\
Books / television / radio / Internet & 14 & 49 & 5 & 21 & 31 \\
Information service (by phone or in face) & 0 & 9 & 1 & 5 & 5 \\
I don’t know where to get information & 0 & 0 & 3 & 3 & 2 \\
I don’t need any information & 0 & 4 & 8 & 5 & 5 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}


Roma teaching assistants or mediators, as well as short summer programs have become increasingly popular to help Roma children integrate in the educational environment and to act as a liaison between children, parents and educational institutions. Mediators are being used in different projects. The average mediator not only communicates to Roma parents the benefits of preschool, but also assists with enrollment procedures. For example, REF's “A Good Start” projects in Romania, Hungary and Slovakia offers enrollment assistance by Roma community mediators, some who work as teaching assistants in the preschool or kindergarten. They also organize community motivation events promoting the importance of pre-school, and help organize open days with Roam parents, as well as provide practical support on how to fill out applications. And in some cases they help the families get identify documents or vaccinations. They also help monitor attendance, visit parents to promote attendance, and help with transport etc. if necessary. Within the Romanian Roma Children project by Save the Children, mediators went to Roma families to explain the benefits of ECE. Also in Romania, Ovidiu Rom's program ‘Every Child in Pre-School and Kindergarten’

\(^{32}\) For a discussion on the topic by Rachel Glennerster and Michael Kremer, see: http://bostonreview.net/BR36.2/glennerster_kremer_behavioral_economics_global_development.php
provided enrollment assistance. For the project of Minority Rights Group International (MRGI) in Slovakia, a Roma mother was selected to perform the functions of a mediator between the kindergarten and the community (Guy and Kovats 2006). There are also several projects that organize short summer programs seeking to boost enrolment in kindergarten and primary school. For example, the Save the Children’s project in Romania organized summer groups for disadvantaged children aged 3 to 5/6, the vast majority of whom were Roma. About 1700 children from 86 (mostly rural) locations in all counties were reached – 860 in the first year of the project and 849 in the second. A considerable portion of children who participated (85 percent for the first year and 94 percent for the second) continued their preschool education after the summer program.

Note that the role of Roma mediators/teaching assistants goes considerably further than merely providing information. While more expensive to implement, this extra dimension may be necessary to boost enrolment rates and subsequent attendance. This is, however, an empirical question, which could be readily evaluated in a rigorous, randomized way, as other studies have shown. Such studies would help answer an important policy question: which method – providing basic information only, or much more active bridging and parental engagement – is the more cost-effective approach?

Finally, projects emphasizing the inclusion of Roma language, history and culture in the preschool curricula can also be considered ‘bridging’ project that may boost attendance, in addition to their quality enhancing role. On a national level, Romania is reportedly the country in which bilingual education in Romanes is most wide-spread (CE and ERCE 2003). According to the Romani language and Roma Counselor at the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports, out of 260000 Roma (self identified) students attending kindergartens, schools and high schools, 31000 children learn Romani (three or four hours a week), and 400 students from kindergarten and grades I to VIII are taught in mother tongue and have a class in “History and Roma traditions”.

In addition to projects seeking to boost enrolment through information and mediation, there are also initiatives that seek to avoid the misplacement of Roma children in institutions for special education, although the focus is mostly on primary school children. The project by Ester NGO in the Czech Republic is such an example. It emphasizes prevention of misdiagnosis at preschool level, through cooperation with kindergartens. As part of Ester’s efforts, discussions were initiated on the importance of preschool education and its role in avoiding Roma placement in special classes (ISSA 2009). The unnecessary over-streaming of children into special needs education is also discussed at education motivation workshops organized as a part of REF’s AGS initiative.

33 Personal communication
While governments in each of the five countries have put programs in place to help poor and disadvantaged families cover the material needs, out of pocket expenses and material needs (e.g. clothing) continue to be a barrier with the exception of Hungary. In Bulgaria, an amendment to the Rules and Regulations for the Application of the Social Assistance Act from 2005 introduced free textbooks and manuals for the one year of compulsory preschool and primary education, free transport or boarding for children who go to preschool or school outside their place of residence, and social benefits to help cover costs related to education fees, school meals and supplies (OSI 2007). In Romania, the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection grants social coupons for 0 to 5-year-old children from poor families for educational purposes in accordance with the legislation of social assistance and depending on family income. However, the legal provisions are new and there are no regulations for the implementation of some of the articles. In Hungary, educational institutions are entitled to additional funding for disadvantaged children, which usually covers free education materials and free meals, among other things. Furthermore, in August (the month before the official start of the school year) disadvantaged families are given double the monthly social allowance they are entitled to, so that they can afford to cover the educational materials for their children for the new school year. (REF 2007c). Since 2008, the Hungarian government also provides “ovoda (=kindergarten) enrollment allowance” for multiply disadvantaged children, but only if they are enrolled in preschool. The impact of enrollment allowances has not been evaluated (Eurydice European Unit 2009). In Slovakia, families below a certain income level or who are receiving social assistance are eligible for subsidies for their child’s meals and school materials and there is waived tuition for all children regardless the income in the last year of kindergarten prior to compulsory primary enrollment. The Czech government also offers subsidized meals for disadvantaged children. However, as highlighted previously (and reproduced below), expenditures on preschool for Roma parents are low only in Hungary, while modest in Slovakia, and (relatively) high in Romania, but especially in Bulgaria and Czech Republic.

**TABLE 20: MONTHLY COSTS (EURO) OF PRE-SCHOOL FOR ROMA CHILDREN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monthly cost (mean - Euro)</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly cost (median - Euro)</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey (2011).*

Various NGOs also offer needs-based support, including providing additional subsidies conditional on attendance. REF’s “A Good Start” initiatives in Romania and Slovakia, and the Romanian Save the Children project Roma Children also prepares children for kindergarten by providing them with snacks, clothes, and food supplies. Ovidiu Rom’s project “Every Child in Pre-School and Kindergarten” similarly provides need based supports. In addition, it provides subsidies to poor parents provided the child enrolls into preschool and attends regularly. This is similar to the subsidy program put in place in Hungary in 2009 and the ‘conditional cash transfer’ programs common in other parts of the world, especially Latin America (e.g. Opportunidades in Mexico, Bolsa Familia in Brazil, and Chile Solidario in Chile). See Box 4 for more details.
BOX 4: “EVERY CHILD IN PRE-SCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN” BY OVIDIU ROM IN ROMANIA

The project Every Child in Pre-school and Kindergarten is carried out by the Romanian NGO Ovidiu Rom in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and funded through a grant from a US-based non-profit organization. Ovidiu Rom previously worked with children of all age groups, but decided to focus on the preschool given the high long-term positive effects proven in other settings. For the school year 2010/2011 it was implemented in 13 communities. The project has four main components: (1) community action, (2) parental incentives, (3) teacher training, and (4) ‘systemic oversight’. The direct cost of the project per child amounts to €210.

The provision of additional classroom space and teaching staff is the responsibility of local authorities and school administration, whereas Ovidiu Rom organizes short teacher training courses, provides new teaching materials selected by teachers, and helps teachers set up weekly courses to inform parents of toddlers (aged two to three) about ECE as well as summer workshops for preschool children.

The project also seeks to motivate parents to participate in the program in a number of ways. At the start of the year (in September) members of local action groups go door-to-door explaining the benefits of ECE and offering assistance with the application procedure, including in cases of missing identity documents. School mediators are also actively involved in follow-up visits, and parents are offered to participate in a direct incentives component of the program under certain conditions: parents are offered food coupons worth €11 per month if they insure 100% attendance of their children and if they attend monthly parent-teacher meetings (in which they are given the coupons). Shoes and clothing are also provided to children who needed them.

To monitor attendance, Ovidiu Rom organizes random visits to the participating schools for monitoring and data collection purposes. It finds that for the first year of its implementation preschool attendance rates were at least 40 percentage points higher than in the previous school year; by March 2011 the project found that 84% of eligible children had 100% attendance rate. The project will be continued in 11 out of the 13 municipalities; 12 of the 13 communities reapplied to continue. One was rejected because the community missed the deadline and a spot check visit found children not present who had been marked as present on the attendance sheet and one of the teachers had filled out the attendance sheet for the next day. In the community that did not reapply, both the teacher and the social worker/coordinator will be on maternity leave next year.

SUPPORT FOR PARENTING

Support for parenting styles has been recognized as an integral and complementary component of effective early childhood education and care. Recall that the information on parenting practices showed that few Roma children have access to reading materials, especially in Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia. The importance of parenting support has been highlighted in several key documents. For example, the Eurydice European Unit (2009a: 23) report calls for “intensive, early starting, child-focused, centre-based education together with strong parent involvement, parent education, program educational home activities and measures of family support”. Similarly, according to the EFA Global Monitoring report (Unesco
good early childhood education and care program characteristics include parental support, especially during the earliest years. And, the recent discussion paper “Preventing social exclusion through the European 2020 Strategy. Early childhood development and the inclusion of Roma families Europe 2020 Strategy” calls for a comprehensive approach to ECE services, which focuses not only on child education but also on home and community environments. Work with parents is seen as especially important and includes advice on parenting, assistance with employment, and job training (UNICEF and ESO 2011). This is also echoed in the RECI (2012) report by UNICEF/REF/OSF. And, finally, recall that the regional Roma survey (2011) underscored the need for parental support by highlighting the lack of, for example reading materials in Roma homes, and highlighting the strong correlation between active parenting and reported cognitive child outcomes.

Support for parenting comes in different forms, but the available information suggests that it has not been implemented systematically and on large scale, nor have there been rigorous evaluations which could guide the most cost-effective techniques. For example, parental participation in extracurricular or in-class activities has been encouraged in the Step-by-Step projects and projects financed by the Bulgarian Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Young People from the Minorities. Discussion groups on parenting practices has also been has been a component of the preschool project of Wide Open School Foundation and Project Schola in Slovakia, and an explicit focus of the Hungary's Meséd project, which is a part of REF's “A Good Start” initiative, and described in more detail in the Box 5 below. Finally, the Council of Europe's “Teaching Kit for Roma Children” is a set of teaching materials developed to help aide young Roma children prepare for school in a home environment. Besides conforming to the school syllabi, it is also practically-oriented towards the everyday-life worlds of the Roma. The kit provides examples of how cheap and readily available material such as lemons, buckets and sand, can be used for engaging educational activities (see ISSA, 2009).

BOX 5: THE MESÉD PROJECT – “YOUR TALE”

The Meséd Project is implemented by Unity in Diversity Foundation with the help of students from the College of Nyíregyháza in six locations in Hungary as a part of Roma Education Fund's EC Roma Pilots “A Good Start”. A major project objective is to improve parenting practices.

As a part of the project mothers meet in small groups (8 to 15) on a weekly basis for two-hour sessions and take turns to practice reading out high quality children's story books, which they also get to keep. A trained facilitator, who is also usually a Roma woman, guides the reading and initiates discussions on certain elements and messages of the story, thus providing the mothers with a teaching technique they can use with their children at home. Furthermore, parenting problems and techniques are discussed during the sessions. Mothers report using the reading techniques they learned during the Meséd sessions and their children taking pride in the books they have received.

There are also relevant experiences from large scale programs around the world supporting parenting practices. For example, disadvantaged mothers of preschool-aged children are provided with a set of learning and training materials as part of the nation-wide “Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters” (HIPPY) in Israel. The program aims to enhance their children's language, sensory, perceptual discrimination and problem solving skills. Mothers are assisted in their educating
tasks by aides, who visit them twice a month, bring a new set of materials, and practice their use with the mothers through role-playing. Mothers are instructed to spend a certain amount of time per week on educational activities with their children. There are also group sessions in which HIPPY mothers get together to exchange practices. The program has been implemented on a nation-wide scale since 1969 and impact evaluation demonstrates significantly higher performance of the HIPPY children, who have participated in the program for three years, when compared to the control group (Young 1996). The Program for the Improvement of Education, Health and the Environment (PROMSEA) in Colombia is a long-term large-scale project that trained disadvantaged Columbian mothers of young preschool-aged children appropriate educational approaches, such as play-based and cognitive methods. "Promoters" taught mothers about play-based and cognitive methods, culturally-appropriate games and toys, and how older siblings can be involved (Arango et al in Siraj-Blatchford and Woodhead 2009). Another parenting program which has proven successful is the Mother-Child Education Program in Turkey. On a nation-wide scale mothers are instructed on their children's development needs and on ways to create a stimulating home environment. Children who participated in the program demonstrated better cognitive skills and greater school readiness (Bekman in Siraj-Blatchford and Woodhead 2009).

INCREASING THE AVAILABILITY OF PRESCHOOL SPACES

Infrastructure development is the most straight-forward way of increasing the quantity of institutionalized early childhood education services. Lack of appropriate infrastructure in many peripheral and disadvantaged areas has prompted the national governments (often in cooperation with international organizations) to focus on renovating, expanding, and building new preschools to improve the quantity and quality of preschool units. World Bank's Social Inclusion Project, which is currently implemented in Bulgaria and Romania, seeks to enhance the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, including Roma, through improving their access to preschool services. To this end, old ECE units in predominantly Roma communities are renovated, repaired and refurnished, other new units are built, and, finally, technical assistance and training of teaching and administrative staff is also provided. The project is financed not only by WB funds, but also by EU Structural Funds and is included in the national budgets (WB 2006; WB 2008). Another national project in Romania, ECER – Early Childhood Education Reform Project is co-financed by the government and the Council of Europe Development Bank. It has a value of 105 million euro and is being implemented between 2007 and 2011. The main objectives are (i) to improve the quality of the education system infrastructure for children aged 3 to 6/7 through rehabilitating and developing of educational units; (ii) to improve the quality of preschool education through teacher training and provision of appropriate equipment; (iii) to establish Resource Centers for Education; and (iv) to develop the MERYS’s educational management system.\textsuperscript{34}, the Hungarian government also started a large-scale nation-wide project, which provides financing for the building,

\textsuperscript{34} http://proiecte.pmu.ro/web/guest/pret
extending and renovating of early childhood education and care units in the most disadvantaged settlements in the country. The envisaged increase in supply of ECD places amount to 15 000 for the period 2009-2013 (Eurydice European Unit 2009b). Efforts of previous Hungarian governments include the “Hundred Steps” program, whose second step, “Education in Small Villages Creating Opportunities and Supporting Micro-Region Cooperation”, involved the enhancement of preschool provision in small villages, among other things (OSI 2007).

Using alternative spaces is a second option to increase the availability of preschool education units. Sometimes new infrastructure development may not be affordable or economically justifiable, especially in small and distant rural areas. In such cases, using alternative places for service provision could be a good solution. However, it is important to ensure that this alternative is not used as a way to create parallel forms of schooling for Roma children, which serve to segregate them from the mainstream education system. A success story in this context is the kindergarten set up by Ruhama Foundation in Telechiu, Romania, as part of the AGS initiative to cater for children for whom there were not enough places in the locality. Eventually, the local government agreed to open a new kindergarten for the school year 2011/2012. Another such example of alternative use of spaces is the “Proyecto Integral de Desarrollo Infantil (PIDI)” in Bolivia (in World Bank 2011: p.93). Instead of building ECD centres, the home of a local woman chosen by the community is used for the provision of care, nutrition and education services of groups of children aged 6 months to 6 years. The program targets poor families in urban areas. An impact evaluation using quasi-experimental data show its positive impact on multiple aspects of the children's development. Similarly, the “Gardens of Mothers and Children” in northern Albania (see ISSA 2009) are ECD services primarily in remote or rural areas provided at locations donated by families or the local government. The organization and provision of services is largely in the hands of the community, partner organizations and volunteers. Children from birth to 6 years of age receive care and preschool education whereas their mothers can participate in training seminars. Finally, in rural areas in Poland, municipalities aided by the Comenius Foundation organize preschool centers in a variety of locations including schools, libraries, community centers, and fire stations. Education is provided for a few hours a day three to four day per week (see ISSA 2009).

Another way of tackling the insufficiency in kindergarten places is through moving to a shift model of ECE provision. Instead of providing full-day services, kindergartens in Kyrgyzstan tend to children in shifts (one in the morning and one in the afternoon), which ensures better use of the available resources and a much larger coverage (see ISSA 2009). In this manner the shortage of kindergartens is partially overcome and, reportedly, the negative impact on the quality of preschool preparation are is not that great since the learning/playing program at full-day centres is about three hours a day. The shift model is found also in rural areas in Poland and the satellite or mobile kindergartens in Kyrgyzstan and Bosnia and Herzegovina (see ISSA 2009). Satellite kindergartens apply the shift model in locations that are too distant from ECE centres and rural villages which cannot afford their own centres. Similarly, for the “Mobile Kindergartens in Mostar and Gorazde” in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see ISSA 2009), teachers are sent in each location twice a week and teach the children for two or three hours using the space and facilities of the primary school as well as toys and materials donated by the SOS.
Giving priority to disadvantaged children is also a possibility to overcome shortage of spaces for Roma. In Hungary preschool attendance is compulsory from the age of 3 onwards in the case of disadvantaged children (and from the age of 5 for the general population) and kindergartens are obliged to give priority to give them priority when deciding on applications.