Welcome to another edition of our e-bulletin!

On the pages that follow we offer interesting information about the activities implemented by the Foundation “Step by Step” in this period. The online initiative “I want to...”, the publishing of the new picture books in Roma language and trainings for teachers are only a part of those. Read about them below and share with your colleagues and friends.

Warm greetings from the Foundation “Step by Step” team
The reading and math assessment study using the EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment) and EGMA (Early Grade Math Assessment) instruments set out to accomplish two objectives:

1. to assess whether the project activities contributed to the improvement of reading and math for second and third grade students;

2. To monitor the reading and math progress of fifth grade students (the group of students tested each year since they were second grade).

The field work of the assessment was conducted in the period between 15th and 31st of May, 2017 for a sample of 3500 second, third and fifth grade students from 70 primary schools in Macedonia in Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish language of instruction.

The assessments were conducted by 150 representatives from schools (school pedagogues, psychologists and lower primary school teachers) previously trained on how to administer the standardized assessment tools using a tablet computer.

To assure that the testing procedure in all schools was conducted according to the international standards and rules for utilizing the EGRA and EGMA instruments, the testing was monitored by observers and project team members who provided support and advice to the assessors.

The results of the study will be shared with the schools and relevant education institutions in order to explore ways in which curricula as well as instruction can be modified to facilitate the improvement of students' basic literacy and numeracy skills. One of the commitments of this project is to create reading standards for Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish language as well as math standards based on the results of this study, in order to help teachers to monitor students' progress.

The Readers are Leaders Project would like to thank everybody who got involved in this study, especially school pedagogues, psychologists and teachers as well as the students, for their contribution in the data gathering process.
In the last trimester of the school year, the project conducted 13 trainings for math teaching techniques “Math +” trainings and 13 trainings for language teaching techniques “How to read, learn and have fun” for representatives from 76 primary schools. All of these trainings were based on presenting a plethora of innovative language acquisition and math skills teaching techniques.

"New ideas that are easy to use. Learning through activities, sharing and cooperation." — participant of the “Math +” training in PS “Krste Petkov Misirkov” — Gevgelija

“This training was an excellent opportunity to share experiences, ask questions, cooperate and reflect.” — participant from the “How to read, learn and have fun” training in PS “Bitolski Kongres” — Cair
In order to improve the cooperation between teachers and parents and to demonstrate an integrative approach in learning math and reading, the picture book creation workshops continue. During April and May we held creative workshops in 42 primary schools with Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish language of instruction. The products created during these workshops are books on math topics through which children not only learn to read but to count, add, subtract or compare numbers.

“The interesting materials at our disposal and the positive atmosphere at the workshop provoked our creativity and the production of picture books which children will love to read.” – participant from PS “Gjorgji Sugarev” – Bitola

Edward Gonzales, General Development Office Director at USAID Macedonia, joined us for a visit of the satellite school of PS “Gjorce Petrov” in the village of Sekirci, municipality of Dolneni, where he read picture books with the students. Mayor of the Municipality of Dolneni Bose Miloseski, the school staff, parents and local media also joined to express their support. We all enjoyed this educational event very much!
During this period we visited central and satellite schools in the Tetovo and Jegunovce region, Bitola, Berovo and Struga. We continue to uphold our commitment to visit schools that don’t have a nearby library.

Magic Literacy Van in PS “Krste Petkov Misirkov” – Bistrica, Bitola

If you want the Magic Literacy Van to visit yours school or your local community, contact us on 02/3077 – 900 or email us at daniel@stepbystep.org.mk or cell: 072/307-328

For additional questions regarding the activities of the USAID Readers are Leaders Project, please contact Ana Dimovska, Information and Communication Officer, through e-mail: ana@stepbystep.org.mk or cell: 072/307-321
With the aim of strengthening cooperation and information exchange on local and national level, the project partners initiated a campaign for raising the public awareness on the importance of promoting equal access to education for the Roma. It is being carried out in cooperation with civil society, schools and local authorities between March and June 2017. Through this camping we strive to:

- highlight the vulnerability of Romani children in regard to accessible opportunities for early education and development;
- remind policy-makers on the need to take into account the needs of Roma in the design of policies and allocation of resources;
- sensitize service providers to the special needs of Romani women and children; and
- inform Romani families and communities on services and education opportunities, and on their benefits.

**SIX REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS HELD**

Roundtable discussion in Prilep with representatives of the NGO sector, schools and local media
Six roundtable discussions were held as part of the campaign in Skopje, Tetovo, Kumanovo, Prilep and Bitola, in cooperation municipalities Gorche Petrov and Kumanovo, the St. Clement of Ohrid University Library – Bitola and the nongovernmental organisations Sonce – Tetovo, KHAM – Kumanovo, Pomo za siromasni i hendikepirani – Prilep and Sumnal - Bitola. Although these are not the first meetings organised of this kind, it was nevertheless encouraging to see the huge interest and open discussion about local level challenges by the present civil society representatives and teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and directors from schools attended by Roma students in all five locations. The main conclusions from the roundtable discussion include:

- Segregation should be combated consistently; there are positive examples, especially in Kumanovo, of schools enrolling Roma students although they are not in their catchment areas so as to avoid the creation of segregated schools with high Roma student intake, which could be followed by other municipalities. There is evidence of decrease in the number of Roma students attending special classes, also in Kumanovo.

- Instruction should be individualized to ensure that Roma students master curricular requirements. A promising approach could be the development of individual learning plans for slow learners, based on the current practice used for mainstreaming children with disabilities. In particular, schools should organize tutorship support and supplementary instruction, and NGO-run community learning centres are proving excellent services; their state funding could be explored.

- Insufficient parental involvement, low parental education attainment and students' irregular attendance contribute to lower student achievements. Schools and NGOs should step up their work and cooperation with families.

- Emigration, low achievements and lack of understanding of the importance of education have caused a significant number of Roma children to drop out of school. In the catchment area of the Prilep Dobro Jovanovski primary school, over 370 out-of-school Roma children have been identified through efforts of staff. Current solutions for second chance education require students to spend 4 months in formal education to compensate for every year of schooling they have missed out. This opportunity is rarely resorted to by both children and adults, which means that novel solutions are necessary that would take into account needs, lifestyles and time available to Roma, as well as their prior knowledge. This problem is expected to increase if and when larger groups of migrant asylum seekers return from Western European countries.

The main messages we take from these meetings are: the willingness to work towards betterment of the education status of and opportunities for Roma children is impressive, and society in general should aim at changing the discourse around education of Roma, moving away from the current problem-based focus to a progress-based approach, based on transparency, accountability and good practices.
Reading and learning resources in the Romani language are very scarce. In addition, many Roma children have no or inadequate command of the Macedonian language, which is the language of school instruction, when starting primary school. To improve their competence in both the Romani and Macedonian language, the Project selected five picture books from the Our First Library collection, already published in Macedonian and Albanian language through the USAID funded Readers and Leaders Project and translated them into Romani. They are already available electronically in our electronic library, and will be distributed to primary schools educating Roma students and to civil society organisations working with Roma children.

We hope that these resources will help parents and educators working with Roma children in their efforts to improve their language competences before starting school and in the process of early literacy.

Within the campaign, from 29 May to 20 June, we are organising an on-line initiative “I want to...” This initiative presents and communicates the sincere messages and wishes that children and family members from Gorche Petrov and Shuto Orizari who are involved in the Project shared with us; they represent universal desires and needs for better education, clean environment, healthy food and dependable income. The aim of this initiative is to sensitisie the general public as to the needs of Roma, and to reiterate that Roma, although often discriminated against because of the low education attainment and social status, have nevertheless the same needs, wishes and desires. The “I want to...” messages shared by participating children and adults include “I want to be an English teacher when I grow up.,” “I want to breathe fresh air!” or “I want to have my own room.” Follow the initiative on our Facebook page.
Activities with children at preschool and at primary school age and with their families are continuing in the community learning centres - Dendo Vas in Gorche Petrov, and Nadez in Shuto Orizari. Here are some:

To celebrate the Erdelezi traditional festival, children from the Nadez CLC, together with their parents and educators created flowers and other decorations that carry the message of the beginning of Spring and celebration of this most important Roma festival. A small picnic was organised in the yard of the CLC, which is the traditional way of marking the fourth day of festivities.

The Dendo Vas organised a creativity workshop on the topic of Healthy Food, attended by parents and children.

In addition, both CLCs organised information sessions presenting various administrative forms and templates required for accessing rights related to citizenship, housing, employment, health, education and social protection. The aim was to enable Roma woman and girls to fill in required administrative forms.
In March 2017, the Leadership for Learning: The Cambridge Network published a book titled “Empowering teachers as agents of change: a non-positional approach to teacher leadership” edited by Dr. David Frost who is one of the founders of the Teacher Leadership methodology, the backbone of the work structure of the learning communities in the current project. The book consists of three sections: stories of practitioners who have conducted a development project in their schools; frameworks of support for teacher leadership and perspectives from policy and research. This book also features an article by Majda Joshevska and Suzana Kirandziska titled “The Rise and rise of teacher leadership in Macedonia” which explains how the learning communities have been facilitated to use the teacher leadership methodology.

The article follows the development of this methodology in the country as complementary to traditional in-service professional development of teachers. Since its beginnings in 2009 the methodology has expanded exponentially and has been incorporated in various projects, reaching hundreds of teachers in the country. The article explains the prospects of this professional development platform to serve several purposes:

- Enhance professionality and learning cultures in schools
- Allowing the legacy of trainings and seminars to be absorbed, modified and embedded in the specific school context
- Increased sense of ownership and self-efficacy beliefs

Furthermore, in the article it is argued that this kind of teacher-led initiatives are actually the beginning of a movement to position teachers in the decision-making process from which they have been excluded for much too long.