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FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURAL INITIATIVES
ЧЕКОР ПО ЧЕКОР • STEP BY STEP

Readers are Leaders Project

USAID READERS ARE LEADERS PROJECT

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Readers are Leaders Project

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Readers are Leaders Project

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On May 15, 2013, the Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives “Step by Step” - Macedonia signed the cooperative agreement with USAID agreeing to provide support to USAID’s *Readers are Leaders (RAL) Project*.

USAID’s Readers are Leaders Project aims to improve children reading and numeracy skills, strengthen teacher pedagogical skills, especially diagnostic and formative assessment skills, and increase overall community recognition of the value of reading and numeracy skills.

The Step by Step Foundation allied with the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities – Skopje and builds partner relations with Macedonia’s national education institutions - the Bureau for Development of Education (BDE) and the National Examinations Center (NEC) to ensure high quality results and sustainability of project activities. To assist in community involvement activities, the Step by Step Foundation has established cooperation with ZELS and with the Youth Cultural Center.

All project activities, with due concern to geographical, ethnic, gender and social diversity, are aimed at addressing the needs of the children in the early grades within the formal education system, children from vulnerable and marginalized groups, including Roma children, children with special needs and residents in remote rural areas, and children residing in institutions, including: hospitals, orphanages, etc.

The project objectives are defined in such a way so as to contribute to, support and enhance the accomplishment of USAID priorities and relevant USAID/Macedonia strategic goals. Main project objectives are to:

- Adapt and administer EGRA and EGMA, USAID funded assessment tools for math and literacy skills in early-grade students, and use collected data to support teachers, school and institutional decision-making;
- Provide baseline data on early grade reading and mathematics outcomes;
- Improve teaching in reading and numeracy by providing professional development activities to early grade teachers and thus improving student achievements;
- Build regional networks that support teachers’ professional development and promote teacher – leaders;
- Design/localize and publish different digital reading and math resources;
- Develop online repository of learning resources and seek to ensure its sustainability;
- Carry out initiatives and creative activities that will raise interest for reading and numeracy in students, engage their families and the wider community.

Readers are Leaders Project is comprised of five components, each having multiple activities to encourage reading and numeracy skills in early grade children:

- Component 1: Reading and Numeracy Assessment
- Component 2: Professional Development
- Component 3: Learning Communities
- Component 4: Digital Learning Resources
- Component 5: Family and Community Involvement

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1.1. Component 1: Reading and Numeracy Assessment

1.1.2 Development and adaptation of EGRA and EGMA instruments

All activities within Component 1: Reading and Numeracy Assessment were planned and implemented in close cooperation and coordination with the main education institutions in the country, the Bureau for Development of Education (BDE) and the National Examinations Center (NEC). Memorandum of Understanding was signed with both institutions.

Each institution nominated advisors to be members of the Work Groups, tasked to work on adaptation of international Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Assessments (EGRA and EGMA) and their development in Macedonian and Albanian language. The other members of the Work Groups included members of teaching colleges and practitioners (pedagogues, psychologists and early grade teachers).

Furthermore, four short-term international consultants for early grade reading and mathematics assessment were hired to lead the Work Groups.

Helen Abadzi, a senior education specialist who has collaborated closely with Research Triangle International (RTI), an organization that developed the EGRA and EGMA tools, with USAID funding, provided her valuable input on designing the most suitable EGRA subtests that would be valid and reliable instrument for measuring the language literacy.

José Noijons, a staff member at the Dutch National Institute for Educational Measurement, led the adaptation and development of EGMA instrument.

David Carrol helped the team with the Tangerine software used for administration of EGRA and EGMA on tablets, uploading the tests and provided directions for analyzing and reporting on the pilot data.

Jehona Shala provided her hands-on experience as skilled facilitator for the training on administration of EGRA and EGMA with the help of tablets.

A general workshop aimed at presenting the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) to education stakeholders was delivered on October 14, 2013 by the international consultant Helen Abadzi to representatives from the selected schools, BDE, NEC, teaching colleges and other USAID-funded projects.

The presentations gave education officials and local curriculum and assessment specialists a global understanding of how the two instruments should be adapted to the local context, aligned to the curricula and the basic rules and conditions that apply for their administration.

EGRA should provide a picture of reading levels within our country to help identify priority areas for instructional improvement and teacher training, so the members of EGRA work groups for both Macedonian and Albanian language had four-day workshop during which they reviewed the instrument components and linkages to curriculum objectives and instruction and adapted the instrument to local conditions using the item construction guidelines (including translating the instrument instructions; developing a local language versions; and modifying the word and passage reading components to reflect locally and culturally appropriate words and concepts).

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The EGRA work group agreed that the EGRA tool would contain four subtasks, including letter recognition, familiar word reading, reading fluency and reading comprehension.

The purpose of the EGMA instrument is to provide information on the level of competency in foundational numeracy skill areas. EGMA implementation should identify particular areas of need warranting further attention, which will allow education stakeholders to consider options for next steps for improving early grade numeracy, and importantly ensuring ownership and sustainability of reforms for the country.

The EGMA Work Group involved in the adaptation process selected relevant overall tasks from the core EGMA tool to be used in Macedonia, aligned the subtasks to the curriculum for 2nd and 3rd grade standards, localized the contexts used in word problems, and translated and adjusted instructions into Macedonian and Albanian language.

The selected subtasks for EGMA instrument for Macedonia included: number identification, number discrimination, naming missing numbers, addition and subtraction, word problems, geometry: shape recognition and pattern extension.

1.1.3 Training for administration of EGRA and EGMA tools

Assessors responsible for application of EGRA and EGMA instruments in the schools have a substantial influence on the quality of any EGRA and EGMA implementation. The pool of assessors included the pedagogues and psychologists as well as several teachers working in the 20 pilot schools. However, BDE and NEC staff and members of the Work Groups for development of EGRA and EGMA also participated at the training for administration of the instruments, as this was natural means of collaborating and building capacity of education institutions to be able to take the role of observers and assure the quality of data collection process.

Total of 78 participants attended the training on EGRA and EGMA administration that took place during the week of November 25 – 29, 2013 in Ohrid.

The overall training provided: presentation on methodology for development of EGRA and EGMA instruments and design of all subtasks, procedures on use of tablet devices for EGRA and EGMA administration, use of EGRA and EGMA on tangerine application and hands-on practice on tablet computers used during the assessment, review of roles and responsibilities of observers and assessors, test for inter-rater reliability, procedure for selection of students from schools and recommendations for actual administration of instruments and distribution of materials.

A manual for administration of EGRA and EGMA tools was prepared to serve as a helpful resource for assessors and observer in the schools, presenting the two instruments and their subtasks as well as the general procedures for their administration.

The second manual was focused on quality assurance during the testing process and was intended for the observers. It outlined the main responsibilities of observers, their specific role in the school, the way of recording and reporting their observations.

1.1.4 Pilot study

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After the two instruments had been finalized and the training for administration had been delivered, EGRA and EGMA were administered to a selection of students in grade 3 (for the grade 2 tests) and grade 4 (for the grade 3 tests) as part of the process for piloting the instruments. The sampling design and procedure were prepared by PhD Beti Lameva from the National Examinations Center. It was decided to test 500 students in grade 3 and 500 students in grade 4 with the language instrument and the same students to be tested with mathematics instrument. All 20 schools were also divided into two strata according to the language of instruction (Macedonian and Albanian).

The data in the pilot study were collected by pedagogues, psychologists and/or selected early grade teachers that were trained to take the role of assessors. The assessment process involved a 10- to 20-minute, individual, oral assessment between the student and the EGRA and EGMA assessor.

With an aim to reduce the time and costs and prevent human error of the paper-based assessment process (logistics, copies, supplies, data entry, etc.), the project opted for electronic data collection, on android-run tablet computers through the application, coined as Tangerine™. This electronic data collection software allowed the data from the assessments to be entered directly into the cloud database.

Tangerine application was found to be very useful for EGRA and EGMA implementations and simplified preparation and implementation of field work, reduced measurement and data entry errors and eliminated manual data entry.

Quality Assurance Officers or Observers selected from the ranks of BDE and NEC advisors, professors from teacher colleges as well as practitioners from the Work Groups that developed the instruments were tasked to oversee and ensure the quality of the data collection for the EGRA and EGMA pilot assessment. Total of 24 observers conducted 35 school visits to monitor the first round of data collection and to ensure compliance with standardized procedures and protocols for the administration of the EGRA and EGMA tool.

1.1.5 Roundtables on language and mathematics curricula

In consultation with the Bureau for Development of Education, the team of the partner organization ISSHS reviewed the curricula and presented the findings to the members of the work groups that will integrate the recommendations in the implementation of the baseline study.

ISSHS and BDE finalized the policy analysis institutional framework and curriculum analysis that are provided as annexes of this annual report. The authors of the policy analysis claim that through legal provisions and policy documents of national and EU character (e.g., The National Conception for nine years primary education: 2007-2015 and ET 2020 respectively) a pedagogical approach is being introduced that imposes certain methodologies aiming at increasing literacy. The authors point out that the EGRA and EGMA process of evaluation of literacy level in Macedonia should take into consideration the overall institutional context in which it is being carried out. Cognitive and other theories that have been applied in the framing of the European life-long learning strategy are subject to analysis in the policy study with the aim to point to the fact that institutional frameworks in the areas of pedagogy both in EU and Macedonia are based on learning theories that have had the upper hand and framing of policies regarding primary education. They affect the predominant style of teaching and

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learning in the national and EU context. Therefore the baseline study that will be produced in the framework of this project should take this fact into account. This is one of the central recommendations of the policy study.

2.1 Component 2: Professional Development

This component aims to improve teaching and student achievement in reading and numeracy by providing professional development activities to early grade teachers based on assessment data. As part of this component, the following activities are planned:

- Training for education officials
- Training for learning communities and teacher champions for promoting reading and numeracy skills
- Preparation of manual for promoting reading skills and
- Preparation of manual for promoting numeracy skills
- Follow-up mentoring visits for teachers

Since this component is closely linked to the Component 1, as the interventions will be tailored based on the assessment data and school needs, these activities will start next year.

3.1 Component 3: Learning Communities

This component will build school-based networks that support teacher professional development and promote teacher “leaders” through following activities:

- Establishing school-based learning communities
- Identifying teacher champions
- Organize and conduct networking meetings and networking events

These activities will start next year.

4.1 Component 4: Digital Learning Resources

This component will focus on building on the activities which other USAID projects have implemented to date, with focus on providing digital learning resources to directly impact the students achievements and result in improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills amongst the students in the first cycle of the primary education in Macedonia.

4.1.1 Digital Repository

The Readers are Leaders digital repository is the repository which stores the project content and resources, including the picture books in audio and digital version, as well as all other products developed by this component.

In consultation with USAID, it was concluded that the most favorable approach is to adapt the current Step By Step website according to USAID standards and create a subdomain to include the project components as part of the existing site.

4.1.2 Cooperation with other projects and institutions

Meetings were held with USAID’s Teacher Professional and Career Development project and USAID’s E-Accessible Education Project in order to familiarize with their activities and explore ways how the Readers are leaders activities can built onto what the other projects have done in the past.

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As part of the Open Educational Resources (OER) Initiative, which calls for sharing of educational resources available under the creative commons domain, the digital learning resources coordinator participated at a round table which addressed the lack of a repository which can host and store different educational resources produced as parts of different initiatives and sustainability and usability of those resources. OER aims to address this problem by providing a storage space and indexing of all open source resources which are created by teachers, institutions and donor funded activities and providing content rich environment for all education professionals from Primary to Tertiary education.

4.1.3 Localization of books

The localizations of the books planned for year one was completed and the selected titles were translated and localized in both Macedonian and Albanian. The titles of the books are

- Dorothy and the glasses
- A baby brother for Peter
- What's the time
- The doll's nose
- Marco goes around the world

Macedonian and Albanian actors recorded the audio versions of the books and the books were fully produced into audio books. The digital audio books are currently being prepared and will be uploaded to the repository as soon as they are completed.

A selection of books was identified by the digital learning coordinator and the working group will identify the most suitable 16 books to be localized during the upcoming reporting periods.

Assistance was requested from USAID's E-Accessible Education Project staff to make sure that the e-accessibility guidelines are followed when designing the digital audio books for the Reader are Leaders project. In addition, all of the localized books were in accordance with the e-accessibility standards that were developed by Open the Windows in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science to be applied for future development of digital textbooks.

5.1 Component 5: Family and Community Involvement

This component aims to develop children's reading skills and basic math skills through set of activities made available to children of different ethnic and social backgrounds especially those of vulnerable groups, children with special needs and children placed in institutions. These activities aim to share new innovative practices with parents and community members but also to build upon the existing literacy and numeracy practices.

5.1.1 Cooperation with the Youth Cultural Center

Under the Readers are Leaders Project activities, a renovation and equipping of the Children Creative Center within the Youth Cultural Center will be realized. It will be equipped with hands-on activities that promote reading and numeracy (books, theatre, literacy and numeracy didactical materials, etc.). Set of activities will be carried out that encourage children's creativity and promote reading and numeracy. Cooperation with ZCC was established. The MoU will be signed in January 2014. Renovation activities and opening for the public will occur in 2014.

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5.1.2 Magic Literacy Van

During the first quarter of the project implementation, market research was conducted to procure the van and procedures and regulations for exterior painting regulated by the laws in Macedonia were checked and followed. First, the team brainstormed some ideas regarding exterior and interior design. The design will reflect the project goals and will link directly to reading and math, and will have USAID marking. Then, in the period September - December the Project Assistant who is a skillful graphic and interior designer, has been working on the van design in continuous coordination with the Project Coordinator and the COP. The interior design was intended to turn the back space of the van into a library with learning materials and a safe, comfortable and stimulating setting for young children. The interior adaptations were finalized by the end of December. The exterior design and branding were being prepared and will be sent to USAID for approval in January 2014.

5.1.3 Reading Roadshow and Reading and Math are Fun activities in pilot schools

These activities are planned as informal and interactive events in selected schools with lower-grade students, their families and other community members, and are moderated by one or two public figures. For this purpose, the project team compiled a list of public figures (actors, singers, sportsmen) who will act as moderators for the activities in the school. They will lead the public reading sessions and other language and math activities with the students and family/community members. The list of public figures will be modified and extended according to field experiences and will try to meet beneficiaries' needs and interests.

Project materials and activities for these types of events are prepared in both Macedonian and Albanian language, and are used according to the language of instruction of the students participating in the activity. In bilingual schools, the events are simultaneously carried out in both languages, with two public figures moderating the activity in the two languages. Free picture books for the students engaged in the activities are provided by Step by Step Foundation.

During the course of November and December, Reading and Math are Fun activities were organized and carried out for all 21 pilot phase schools. A total number of 1876 participants attended. Out of them, 1489 were lower-grade students, 163 parents and other family members, 215 school staff, and the rest of them were other representatives from the local community and the media.

5.2 Cross-cutting activities

2.6.1 Application process for schools

The call for school applications was opened on September 11 and publicly presented at the launch event on September 12. The call lasted until September 25 and by this deadline 190 applications were received from 65 municipalities, from all eight regions in Macedonia.

An Evaluation Committee, comprised of members of project staff and representatives from the BDE and NEC, reviewed the applications. Taking into consideration the criteria for representation and the qualitative assessment of applications, each school was ranked among the other schools in the region, and with the help of proportion model, the 60 schools

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ere selected, 20 for each phase of the project. The results were published on Step by Step's website on October 4, 2013 and notification letter was sent to all selected schools.

List of selected primary schools for participation in project activities per phases

| Phase 1 | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------|
| Name of school | Place | Municipality | Region |
| Stiv Naumov | Skopje | Gazi Baba | Skopje |
| Naum Naumovski - Borche | Skopje | Gazi Baba | Skopje |
| 11 Oktomvri | Skopje | Centar | Skopje |
| Blazhe Koneski | Skopje | Aerodrom | Skopje |
| Petar Zdravkovski - Penko | Skopje | Butel | Skopje |
| Goce Delchev | Mogila | Mogila | Pelagonija |
| Kocho Racin | Ivanjevci | Mogila | Pelagonija |
| Sv. Kiril I Metodij | Bitola | Bitola | Pelagonija |
| Elpida Karamandi | Bitola | Bitola | Pelagonija |
| Kiril I Metodij | Kochani | Kochani | East |
| Slavcho Stojmenski | Vinica | Vinica | East |
| Goce Delchev | Konche | Konche | Southeast |
| Sv. Kliment Ohridski | Ohrid | Ohrid | Southwest |
| Naim Frasheri | s.Jagol Dolenci | Kichevo | Southwest |
| Sande Shterjovski | Kichevo | Kichevo | Southwest |
| Simche Nastovski | Vratnica | Jegunovce | Polog |
| Bratsvo Migjeni | Tetovo | Tetovo | Polog |
| Hristijan Todorovski Karposh | s.Dragomance | Staro Nagorichane | Northeast |
| Ilinden | Kriva Palanka | Kriva Palanka | Northeast |
| Liria | s.Jabolchishte | Chashka | Vardar |
| Blazhe Koneski | Veles | Veles | Vardar |
| Phase 2 | | | |
| Name of school | Place | Municipality | Region |
| Mirche Acev | Skopje | Gjorche Petrov | Skopje |



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| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Strasho Pindzur | Skopje | Gjorche Petrov | Skopje |
| Goce Delchev | Gorno Lisiche | Aerodrom | Skopje |
| Brakja Miladinovci | Skopje | Aerodrom | Skopje |
| Drita | s.Rashche | Saraj | Skopje |
| Goce Delchev | Prilep | Prilep | Pelagonija |
| Sv. Kiril I Metodij | s.Buchin | Krushevo | Pelagonija |
| Manchu Matak | Krivogashtani | Krivogashtani | Pelagonija |
| Blazhe Koneski | Tochila | Prilep | Pelagonija |
| Nikola Petrov Rusinski | s.Rusinovo | Berovo | East |
| Vancho Kitanov | Pehchevo | Pehchevo | East |
| Josip Broz Tito | Valandovo | Valandovo | Southeast |
| Sv. Kliment Ohridski | Draslajca | Struga | Southwest |
| Grigor Prlichev | Ohrid | Ohrid | Southwest |
| Andreja Savevski Kikish | Tetovo | Tetovo | Polog |
| Prparimi | Chegrane | Gostivar | Polog |
| Faik Konica | s.Slupchane | Lipkovo | Northeast |
| Vasil Glavinov | Veles | Veles | Vardar |
| Jordan Hadzi Konstantinov - Dzinot | Veles | Veles | Vardar |
| Kiril i Metodij | Sveti Nikole | Sveti Nikole | Vardar |
| Phase 3 | | | |
| Name of school | Place | Municipality | Region |
| Vasil Glavinov | Skopje | Chair | Skopje |
| Kuzman Shapkarev | Drachevo | Kisela Voda | Skopje |
| Avram Pisevski | s.Bardovci | Karposh | Skopje |
| Bratstvo | Taftalidze | Karposh | Skopje |
| Vojdan Chernodrinski | Skopje | Karposh | Skopje |
| Mite Bogoevski | Resen | Resen | Pelagonija |
| Rampo Levkata | Prilep | Prilep | Pelagonija |
| Pere Toshev - Dupjachani | Dupjachani - Desovo | Dolneni | Pelagonija |
| Slavko Lumbarkovski | Novaci | Novaci | Pelagonija |
| Tosho Arsov | Shtip | Shtip | East |
| Nikola Karev | Probishtip | Probishtip | East |
| Vlado Kantardziev | Gevgelija | Gevgelija | Southeast |
| Bratstvo - Edinstvo | Ohrid | Ohrid | Southwest |
| Strasho Pindzur | Vevchani | Vevchani | Southwest |
| Pashko Vasa | Grupchin | Zhelino | Polog |
| Dervish Cara | Dolno Palchishte | Bogovinje | Polog |

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| | | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Hristijan Karposh | Kumanovo | Kumanovo | Northeast |
| Tode Hadzi - Tefov | Kavadarci | Kavadarci | Vardar |
| Tosho Velkov Pepeto | Kavadarci | Kavadarci | Vardar |
| Pere Toshev | Rosoman | Rosoman | Vardar |

2.6.3 Signing of Memorandum of Understanding with selected schools

The project team prepared memorandum of understanding defining the main responsibilities of both signing parties – The Foundation “Step by Step” – Macedonia as implementer of the USAID Readers are Leaders Project and the respective school. Project team visited all 21 schools in order to sign the agreement, meet the school staff that will be engaged in the project activities and inform them about the project planned activities. A separate Annex to the MoUs was prepared and signed in order to regulate the technical equipment (a tablet computer) that RAL is providing to each school for the needs of the anticipated project activities.

2.6.4. Communications

Project launching event

The official launching and promotion of the Readers are Leaders Project took place in the National and University Library “St.Klement of Ohrid” on September 12, starting at noon. Approximately 100 guests attended the official part of the event i.e. the official addressing of the MD, Mr.James Stein, the Director of the BDE, Ms.Vesna Horvatovich, and Deputy Director of the State Examinations Center, Ms. Blagica Lasoska. During the event, RAL COP, Ms.Suzana Kirandziska, presented the planned project activities and announced the call for school involvement in the project activities, which was opened on September 11. Additionally, around 30 students with their parents and teachers were present in the children’s corner established in the hall of the library, and took part in the public reading session led by two actors Amernis Nokshiqi and Sashko Kocev.

Readers are Leaders Project in the media

The project launching event, the results of the selection process for the schools and the beginning of the Reading Roadshow were announced in several media during this period.

Also, Step by Step website and Facebook page were regularly used to inform the public about the official launch event, open call for school participation in project activities, planned activities within the Reading Roadshow, as well as ads for open positions within the Readers are Leaders Project. The existing website of the Foundation is being redesigned, and a new subdomain for the Readers are Leaders Project activities and updates will be created. The new website will be made available to the public in January 2014.

Communication and promotional materials

Project two-pager covering general objectives and activities was produced in English, Macedonian and Albanian. It is used in printed and electronic version. E-bulletins will be

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produced monthly and distributed electronically to project stakeholders and beneficiaries to inform them about the ongoing activities and promptly inform about planned events and initiatives. The e-bulletin is published on the website, social media and distributed through e-mail to an extensive database of recipients (all primary schools, BDE and NEC representatives, other partners).

The first issue of the e-bulletin was prepared and disseminated in the beginning of October in English and Macedonian. The second issue of the e-bulletin was prepared and disseminated in the beginning of December.

2.6.5 Procurements

In the reporting period the following major procurements were realized throughout the regular procurement procedures: tablet computers for the pilot phase schools and a vehicle that will serve as the Magic Literacy Van.

2.6.6 Environmental Compliance

Step by Step Foundation fully supports the Agency's objective to conserve and protect the environment and manage their exploited resources for sustainable yields.

2.6.7 Disability Policies

During the process of selecting a venue for the Project launch event, USAID disability policies were taken into consideration, and the National and University Library "St. Klement of Ohrid" provided an access ramp suitable for people with physical disabilities. The recommended tagline was used on the invitation sent out for the event, encouraging invitees to request for additional commodities, if needed.

All of the digital learning resources which have been developed by the project during the first year are accessible to people with disabilities and target both students with visual and audio impairment. The books can be accessed both online and offline and are available in the Step by Step digital library.

In addition the project is also exploring opportunities to address the ever growing need of the Macedonian teachers to be able to identify students with dyslexia and develop PLP's. Since this is a relatively new area for Macedonia, the project has gotten in touch with experts from neighboring countries that use the Cyrillic alphabet to see if any instruments have been developed that can be used in Macedonia. This idea was welcomed by both the primary school teachers as well as the Ministry of Education, who expressed their full support related to the dyslexia activities.