



REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM'S OMBUDSPERSON CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Background

[REF Scholarship Program \(REF SP\)](#) runs merit based academic competition in 16 Program countries under four scholarship schemes:

- The Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (**RMUSP**) is the largest scholarship scheme, offered to support the educational achievements of Roma students in tertiary education.
- The Roma Health Scholarship Program (**RHSP**) is a complex program run with the support of the Roma Health Project of the Open Society Foundations in Budapest. The Program supports Roma students studying in the field of medicine in Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, and Romania.
- The Law and Humanities Scholarship Program (**LHP**) provides scholarships in Moldova, Russia and Ukraine with a joint support of the German EVZ Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" and the Roma Education Fund. This program supports primarily students in Law and Humanities fields.
- The Roma International Scholar Program (**RISP**) provides partial support to Roma students pursuing education outside of their home country or country of their residence.

Throughout the implementation process of these scholarship schemes, the Roma Education Fund Scholarship Program's aim is to support students' efforts to complete and submit their application in an effective, transparent and user-friendly way. REF SP has an established procedure for dealing with applicant's inquiries and appeals; however, depending on their nature the Program intends to benefit from an independent entity's opinion.

REF Scholarship Ombudsperson

There is an established mechanism of REF SP's administration and processing, which involves, among others, Country Coordinators based in Program countries. The overall management, coordination and administration of REF SP are conducted from REF Headquarters in Budapest.

The Ombudsperson, as a neutral third party, will familiarize himself/herself with the policies, procedures and guidelines of the Programs and help resolving potential procedural inadvertences as raised and reported by REF SP scholarship applicants.

Task of the Ombudsperson

The primary task of the of the Ombudsperson is to investigate, recommend solutions, mediate disputes and monitor the implementation of the solutions proposed in relation with complaints of procedural failures related to the scholarship program that are brought to his /her attention.

The Ombudsperson will perform the following tasks:

1. Related to referred individual complaints from applicants and /or scholarship beneficiaries

- Identify procedural issues of REF SP and its implementation, on the basis of referred complaints submitted through the established appeal channels;

- Investigate and document referred complaints by consulting all involved parties—applicants /beneficiaries, REF, the Open Society Foundations or other implementing partners, at her/his discretion. If a complaint is complex or serious, or if otherwise necessary, the Ombudsperson may conduct field visits to investigate and collect information;
- Prepare an assessment report analysing the findings for each complaint and submit to REF SP his /her recommendation for resolution of the case;
- Propose recommendations for solutions to REF and its partners, like Roma Health Project in regard to RHSP, on the individual complaints;
- Involve various meansⁱ to resolve complaints, depending on the specifics of the cases, among which mediation-like methods and approaches;
- Keeping the complainant informed on the current status of his/her complaint.

2. Related to systemic program-specific issues/problems identified

- Provide information as requested to all affected partners of REF Scholarship Programs (e.g. RHSP);
- Recommend to REF SP specific procedures and rules for overcoming systematic problems identified;
- Prepare for REF SP, and for relevant partners an interim and annual report specifying his/her recommendations on each systemic problem identified during the course of the previous year;
- Communicate instances of mismanagement of SP activities, to the REF board.

REF supports the work of the Ombudsperson by providing him/her with investigative assistance. REF will provide the necessary documentation, access to Program files and procedural interpretations regarding the outstanding cases, as needed, either from REF headquarters or at the level of country coordination units.

Timeframe: The mandate of the Ombudsperson's position lasts for two years.

Suggested working protocols:

- Get acquainted in detail with the processes, rules, guidelines, selection criteria, appeal mechanism of all the related scholarship schemes;
- Prepare timesheet and expenses form;
- Prepare working methodology;
- Establish minimal criteria needing investigation in form of field assessment.

Working phase

- Responding to referred appeals received;
- File complaints and recommendations in a database;
- Acknowledge by responding via e-mail in maximum 48 hours;
- Initiate investigation by contacting relevant actors, by e-mail or phone;

- Record all information and correspondence in case a field assessment is required, prepare pre-mission memo detailing the reasons, and planned activities of the mission and submit it to REF SP;
- Conduct field assessment;
- Prepare facts finding report with brief conclusions and suggestions to REF SP;
- Inform involved parties on the resolution and steps taken. All parties should strive to find a resolution within 14 working days of receiving a complaint;
- Establish and maintain up-to-date and timely information with REF SP and relevant parties of the resolution and suggestions made;
- Submit draft of interim and annual report to REF SP;
- Finalize annual report as requested.

Personal and professional qualifications of the Ombudsperson

- Having experience and /or being acquainted with the REF SP;
- Not having been a beneficiary, grantee, consultant or employee of REF or the Open Society Foundations for the last 3 years;
- Graduate of Law or other relevant degree;
- High level of communication and written English skills;
- Romani or other languages from the region would be an advantage;
- High level of discretion, tactfulness, and professionalism;
- Proved interpersonal and conflict management skills;
- Excellent investigative and documentation and analytical skills.

Candidates of Roma origin are strongly encouraged to apply.

Applications for the position, containing a CV/resume and a letter of intention should be sent to the Financial and Administrative Manager, Mr. Jenő Zsiga at jzsiga@romaeducationfund.org and to the Program Officer at the Roma Health Project, Ms. Alina Covaci at alina.covaci@opensocietyfoundations.org

Deadline for application is 31st July, 2014.

ⁱ An ombudsman or public advocate is usually appointed by the government or by parliament, but with a significant degree of independence, who is charged with representing the interests of the public by investigating and addressing complaints of maladministration or violation of rights. In some countries an Inspector General, Citizen Advocate or other official may have duties similar to those of a national ombudsman, and may also be appointed by the legislature. Below the national level an ombudsman may be appointed by a state, local or municipal government, and unofficial ombudsmen may be appointed by, or even work for, a corporation such as a utility supplier or a newspaper, for an NGO, or for a professional regulatory body.

Whether appointed by a legislature, the executive, or an organization (or, less frequently, elected by the constituency that he or she serves), the typical duties of an ombudsman are to investigate complaints and attempt to resolve them, usually through recommendations (binding or not) or mediation. Ombudsmen sometimes also aim to identify systemic issues leading to poor service or breaches of people's rights. At the national level, most ombudsmen have a wide mandate to deal with the entire public sector, and sometimes also elements of the private sector (for example, contracted service providers). In some cases, there is a more restricted mandate, for example with particular sectors of society. More recent developments have included the creation of specialized Children's Ombudsman and Information Commissioner agencies. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ombudsman>