



INSCHOOL

Inclusive schools: Making a difference for Roma children

The European Commission and Council of Europe are initiating a new joint project on “Inclusive schools: making a difference for Roma children” targeting schools where Roma children learn, in **the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovak Republic and United Kingdom**.

The starting point of the project “Inclusive schools: making a difference for Roma children” is based on the main assumption that it is not enough to draw up policies of change. Change needs to be reflected at school level and in the environment of the children and there is often a gap between the statements and requirements in policy documents and the reality in which these need to be implemented. Practise has proven that for schools to overcome the rift of exclusive teaching and learning approaches, they have to re-examine what they teach, how they teach and how they assess learners’ performances. A real link with the non-formal education and the support for families and communities is necessary to create a shift in education - for the benefit of all learners.

Instead of focusing on the child as the problem, INSCHOOL puts at the heart of its action the education system and its capacity to respond to the needs of Roma children, to celebrate differences and support their learning experience.

How will it work?

The main activities under this project will focus on two levels. The first level will be pilot schools, with the aim to increase the understanding for the benefits of inclusive education¹. Within each country, the programme will target up to 4 schools in different municipalities, and will include one additional school with proven know-how in inclusive education practices per country as “national support school”. The second level of intervention will target policy review and adaptation.

The project thus consists of four interlinked intermediate outcomes:

- 1) Setting up support mechanisms and resources for **pilot inclusive schools**;
- 2) **Provision of support to teachers** to practice inclusive teaching;
- 3) **Supporting the removal of concrete barriers for vulnerable groups** including through **changes of legislation in the targeted countries**;
- 4) **Raising awareness of the benefits of inclusive education** for the general public as well as decision makers;

At the beginning of the project, the initial criteria for selection of pilot schools will be developed in consultation with Ministries of Education from each country.

Desired impact

By the end of the project (December 2018), teachers will acquire new skills that will enable them to manage their class despite the diverse learning needs, they will be able to practice multi-level teaching methods that enable them to identify barriers the

¹ Inclusive education (ie), as defined in the Salamanca statement promotes the “recognition of the need to work towards ‘schools for all’/institutions which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs”.



child is experiencing, teaching in a way that includes all these learners accommodating the different needs and learning styles. Staff will be confident and better equipped, through the effective training they will have received.

Children experiencing barriers to learning, instead of being prescribed to a “special school” which might be far away from their home or being left out of the school, will be enrolled and/or full part of the school within their neighborhood.

With well-functioning structures such as well-informed and trained teachers, adequate out-of-school activities and non-formal education support for children, targeted support measures for vulnerable children and families, etc. the school governance ensures the whole school community is developed to teach learners in a way that brings the best out of them. Overall school performance is improved as learners are learning in an environment that takes their needs into account.

Other experiences in inclusive education for Roma children

In the development of INSCHOOL, a number of experiences in schools and at grassroots level served as inspiration in moulding the project framework. Below are presented two of these examples, corresponding to the two types of intervention in schools (formal and non-formal education).

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN FORMAL EDUCATION – THE EXAMPLE OF BABINGTON

Babington Community Technology College is an 11-16 comprehensive school on the outskirts of Leicester. It has a growing Czech and Slovak Roma cohort of students. Over the past few years the number of pupils joining the school has increased significantly. The inclusive ethos of the school has played a significant part in this growth alongside the outstanding work and effort of the very experienced EAL (English as an Additional Language) team within the school. Encouraging signs of this effort are emerging: improved attendance, increased engagement and raised aspirations are all reflecting the outstanding work of the school.

The determination of the school to raise standards further has led to their moving up to the next level of focusing on attainment. Initially the school has focused rightly on building relationships between key members of staff and Roma pupils. Developing trust, which is vital in the context of this group, learning their story and spending time listening to them. Modifying the curriculum offer and being flexible with the timetable, reflecting the Roma history and culture in school, and drawing parents into school, have all played and continue to play a major role in activating and developing an interest in learning for this group. The school now wants to focus on improving literacy across the curriculum but they are finding age specific, cultural reflective Roma literacy resources hard to find. The attainment of Roma pupils in terms of national examination scores has improved year on year. One former Roma pupil is in her second year of study at a top UK university (University College London) and last year, for example, 3 Roma pupils left with the best possible examination scores and other Roma pupils attend high level work related learning courses. Only 3 Babington Roma pupils in 9 years have failed to stay in education until the age of 18. Many current Roma pupils at Babington have assessment scores which are very high.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND ROMA CHILDREN – THE EXAMPLE OF THE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION CLUB

The Alternative Education Club (AEC) is a non-formal education programme which started in 2010 in Bucharest, in the elementary school no.136 and was extended in the following 2 years in 2 other schools (no. 2 and no. 148). Currently it includes over 200 Roma and non-Roma children from Ferentari. The AEC’s aim is to support children to break the vicious circle of marginalization, poverty and hopelessness, through sport and alternative education.

The objectives of the Alternative Education Club are to create a safe, creative and challenging space for the children, inside the school, offer counseling and mentoring for a group of children who are actively involved in the project, develop innovative approaches focused on school performance improvement and also forming cognitive, artistic and creative abilities, create strong sport teams in order to improve discipline, team work, self-esteem and respect for the opponent; promote the idea of active citizenship and respect among the Roma and non-Roma children involved in the project;

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Six days a week, even during the summer holiday, children have access to a multitude of activities. **Remedial education** – depending on the level of knowledge, children are supported by members of the team to improve competences like mathematical skills or reading and writing in Romanian or English. The goal of this activity is to support the children to reach the educational level suitable for their age. **Non-formal education** (sports, artistic and cultural activities) – Sport is one of the most popular activities from the club, engaging children in a fun but disciplined manner. The team of AEC believes that sports can play a crucial role in a child's development, molding his/her personality and teaching dedication, team work and mutual respect. Currently they created teams practicing: football (children are coordinated by a Roma trainer from the community), handball, street dance (Born4Trouble dance crew). During the last 4 years the children have also taken other classes like: contemporary dance, basketball, table tennis, volleyball, boxing, gymnastics and also psycho-educational counseling.

- **Artistic and cultural activities** – drama (coordinated in 2010 and 2011 by professional actors – both Roma and non-Roma), music (coordinated in the past by professional Roma and non-Roma musicians), painting, financial education (Aflatoun and Aflateen), health education, photography, quilling, storytelling, educational games.

- **Mentoring** – this activity aims to consolidate the relationship between the children and the staff of the AEC by counseling them in order to define the personal development objectives. Furthermore this component aims to trace a typology of positive role models for the children to refer to in contrast to the negative role models they have in the community.

- **Community organizing** – each week the Club organizes meetings with mothers who participate in the AEC activities in order to identify issues within the community and to find the most suitable solutions to engage and involve the members in the process of change.

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