

D6.6. First policy brief



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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
CA	Consortium Agreement
CO	Confidential
DMP	Data Management Plan
DoA	Description of the Action
EC	European Commission
GA	Grant Agreement
GenA	General Assembly
PCO	Project Coordinating Officer – Coordinator, Wesley
PO	Project Officer (EU Commission)
QA	Quality Assurance
QAP	Quality Assurance Plan
RIA	Research and Innovation Action
WP	Work Package
WT	Work Task



Inclusion4Schools Project Summary

The emerging European context is to a large extent characterized by widening and deepening inequalities, the crisis of democracy, and the disintegration of communities. It is especially the case in the Central-Eastern European semiperipheral, post-socialist context, where there is a growing tendency of rearticulating authoritarian, nationalist, neoconservative discourses, which are increasingly infiltrating the political landscape within and beyond Europe. This „retrotopia“ is conducive to the hegemonic production of an imaginary social homogeneity, which consequently stirs up reactionary xenophobia, fear, and hatred through the construction of external intruders (e.g. the migrant) and enemies within (e.g. the Roma). Such a milieu steeped in fear tears up old wounds and produces new divisions as well, hence the construction of new walls – symbolically, as well as physically. Since the leitmotif of this programme is primarily educational, the proposed action targets such (imaginary, symbolic, and real) walls of exclusion which are intended to segregate children (based on class, ethnicity, gender, etc.), which are meant to divide and alienate the local communities to which those children nonetheless belong, thus actively (re)producing inequalities. **In contrast to the power-relations of exclusion, the culture of silence, and the reproduction of unjust structures, the project aims to foster and promote pedagogical relations of inclusion, a culture of dialogue, and the transformation of unjust structures through education.** Running in parallel to the research and innovation actions the central objectives of the proposed action are

- (1) to support and coordinate community schools (as being central to the constitution and maintenance of cohesive local communities) and their respective communities of practice, and
- (2) to create a place and culture of sharing (knowledge, praxis, solidarity) between such communities by initiating and coordinating the convergence and synergies of local, regional and transnational communities.

The expected impact of the proposed project is to contribute to the European initiatives and interventions that aim at reversing inequalities. Adopting a mission-oriented, impact-focused approach to address the specific challenges of the call, synergies will be enhanced between the relevant stakeholders through coordinating and supporting the cooperation between teachers, researchers, local communities and other relevant stakeholders (such as policy-makers), in order to generate networks of policy development and to promote the policy uptake of the project.

Partners:

Participant No	Participant organisation name	Country
1 (Coordinator)	John Wesley Theological College	Hungary
2	Regional Centre for Information and Scientific Development	Hungary
3	C.E.G.A. Foundation	Bulgaria
4	J. Selye University	Slovakia
5	Oltalom Charity Society	Hungary
6	Albanian National Orphans Association	Albania



1. Introduction

According to the data of Eurostat, in 2008, 17% of the population in the EU-27 countries were at risk of poverty and social exclusion that is 81 million people, while in 2017, it was 22.4 % of the population in the EU-28 that is 112.8 million people. The Europe 2020 strategy has set the reduction of poverty and social exclusion as a key target, by aiming to lift 20 million people out of the risk of social exclusion. Schools have a decisive role in this endeavour however, this role is increasingly overestimated considering the fact, that education, in itself, is incapable of mitigating and reversing the multiplicity of social symptoms at the intersections of inequalities – from joblessness to ethnic segregation to territorial stigmatization and so on. The hope in the imagined roles and promises of education becoming a quasi-religious belief is often called the “education gospel”, which is combined with the language of “learnification” namely, that the individualizing discourse of learning is becoming dominant in addressing social problems such as inequality and exclusion. In relation to this Tomasz Szkudlarek rightly says: “learning has become the solution to nearly anything. Joblessness, inadequate retirement provisions, environmental pollution, or poor health services are no longer seen ‘simply’ in terms of public arrangements, but as problems demanding individual awareness, knowledge, proper attitudes, skills of rational choice, and self-management. To us as educators, it may sound nice and smell like money; but it inflates the responsibilities of education far beyond their conceivable limits...”

Therefore, the overestimated role of education exposes the schools to a myriad of high expectations (i.e., they are expected to contribute to economic prosperity, democratization, inclusion and individual development), which those schools, that are left alone at the intersections of inequalities fail to deliver due to their being structurally inadequate. However, as other researchers point out, schools are not islands, and even if they are left alone and isolated to a certain degree, they are always surrounded with exploitable opportunities for increasing their social embeddedness, professional networking, cooperation and engagement – *in potentia*. The basic consideration behind the need and urgency of situating and positioning schools as open to and embedded into their respective local communities and professional networks, is precisely the given condition that education is unable to reverse inequalities if left alone. Hence, a number of studies promote parental and community involvement in schools, the development of communities of practice, horizontal synergies and networks for learning and development, the public engagement of teachers, and public pedagogy. This extended understanding of the school and education (positioned as an inherent part of communities and networks) engendered the revival of the idea of community schools, which are characterized by vivid inter-institutional cooperation, parental and community involvement, and heterogeneous extracurricular activities. This project aims at focusing on such emerging community schools that are situated in social contexts marked by deep inequalities and exclusion. Putting the emphasis on communities is of utmost importance, not only for education but for the society as well. The international answer to the challenge of social disintegration, the crisis of democracy, and rising inequalities has always been the development of communities, just as it is today: community-based capacity building projects and community-led local developments have taken precedence during the past decades.



2. Evidence and Analysis

This Policy Brief provides a short overview of the results of a survey of institutions and settings for disadvantaged children in Inclusion4Schools project partner countries, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary and partly Slovakia. This document will mostly focus on the parallels and similarities revealed by the survey since these findings can serve as a basis for elaboration of common policy suggestions in the future. The survey took place in the framework of Task 1.2 of the first work package of the project, from January to October 2021.

The selection of the institutions and communities was carried out in several stages and using a wide range of data. We had undertaken to visit at least twenty schools in each country with whom we would like to establish contact and intensify our cooperation in the coming years.

Current legislation prohibits all forms of school segregation in the four countries studied. Nevertheless, we find a significant number of schools everywhere affected by segregation. The main reason for this is that the economic backwardness of some areas is accompanied by social decline, with the poorest groups in society settling in the backward areas, among whom the Roma are strongly over-represented. Paradoxically, the segregated schools do not have a different curriculum from other primary schools, as the targeted countries do not recognise the fact of educational segregation itself, nor do they consider these schools to be special, unlike, for example, ethnic minority schools or special education schools. Therefore, the topic proved to be quite sensitive, so we had to design our tools very carefully.

Tools of data collection included: use of official education statistics in order to get a complete picture of the existence, quality and applicability of indicators measuring the social background of students in each country; online questionnaires - one to survey schools, one to survey municipal leaders (mayor's offices, municipalities) and one to survey NGOs; personal interviews carried out either in face-to-face meetings or by online video chat and an attitude test focusing on three dimensions - attitudes towards social change, attitudes towards Roma and attitudes towards the community.

Results were expected and monitored closely. In Albania and Bulgaria several schools were contacted, mostly via phone and some in person. In Hungary, due to the passivity of the institutions the survey was sent out to all recipients again starting from 20 April. Later 150 schools in Hungary were contacted by phone too, to have more results. In Slovakia only a small number responded and it is still to be clarified if this passivity is a result of distrust in external institutions or a scepticism based on previous unsuccessful attempts to solve their problems.

Main problems identified:

General:

Most municipalities have many families living in extreme poverty. With a few exceptions, school buildings and infrastructure need renovation.

Childcare takes priority over education. Most of the families have needs that are different from mainstream society, live in poverty with no prospects. Often, they cannot afford food, medicine, or adequate clothing, resulting in high absenteeism.

Early marriages, childbearing and drop outs at the age 12-15 for Roma girls is a common issue. Many people living in deep poverty, especially in regions where unemployment rate is high, do not take their children regularly to schools because the inter-relatedness between schooling and social prosperity is not palpable enough in the lagging regions.



Shortage of professionals in areas where children face social problems or individual learning difficulties should be addressed.

Schools' relationship with parents:

The practices of the schools vary, although all experience problems with different groups of parents, and most often the most marginalised.

Schools generally find it difficult to develop a cooperative relationship with parents.

Unfortunately, very often parents are not sufficiently responsive to teachers' initiatives (e.g. do not answer messages sent in written form) while on the other hand, teachers often lack adequate communicational tools for involving parents living in deep poverty.

Schools' relationship with the maintainer:

The system of school maintenance is different in each participating country, therefore the problems they are facing are of different character. The countries studied are also quite different in terms of school autonomy, as dependence on the maintainer is strongest in all three, meaning the state in one, local government in another, and other actors such as the church in the third.

Schools' relationship with civic organisations:

The only common element in the country reports is that the relations with civil society organizations differ from one school to another. There seem to be no established patterns or ways of cooperation that are universally valid to our target schools. Another common feature is that cases which can be considered as replicable good practices are relatively rare.

The impact of social segregation on schools:

The main lesson learnt from the outcomes of the investigation is that the schools are mainly a reflection of the socio-economic situation and the cultural attitudes of population living around them.

If one school has the reputation of belonging to one community (i.e. Roma school), consequently the chances of segregation increase and it is unusual for a parent from the majority population to send their kids to these schools.

There are less additional funds available for the schools, and less communication between school and community.

Poor educational status and bad school conditions also decrease the level of trust among socially excluded parents, and this often weakens the efficiency of family support provided to the children.

Specific values developed by teachers in segregated schools are:

- empathy and the ability to address children on the most sensitive issues
- a complex approach to children's problems and how to deal with them
- versatility, combining different support roles
- social sensitivity, socially critical approach
- commitment, ethos of the teaching profession
- seeking break-out points (e.g., project involvement, applications, network building)



- consciously strengthening resilience by developing their own methodology, curriculum or teaching materials Roma (and Egyptian in Albania) integration and solidarity in the settlement:

With few exceptions, Roma do not meet solidarity within the local community. At individual and family level there is acceptance, but when it comes to group solidarity, attitudes are usually negative.

Secondary segregation happens when the number of Roma children increases in a school, and the parents from the majority withdraw their children and enrol them in “ethnically clean” schools.

The relationship between schools and the community:

All schools found that the school serves the community and not the other way around.

The relationship between community and school was generally considered to be very weak.

All of the schools visited acknowledged the importance of community building activities and the involvement of local players, actors, and community into the work of the school. However, according to the teachers’ explanation, the majority of Roma parents do not have sufficient trust in educational institutions, therefore their participation in school life is not as active as majority parents’ participation.

Empowering the school boards, consisting of parents, students, teachers, local government, and community representatives, could benefit the schools especially on terms of improving infrastructure, services, school management, fund raising and teaching staff.

The main wishes of schools:

- to have sufficient funds – both for supplies and infrastructure, and for staff and experts;
- methodological support for effective teaching;
- to have funds for extracurricular and community building activities;
- guidance on how to improve relations with parents and the community.

3. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The expected impact of the proposed project is to contribute to the European initiatives and interventions that aim at reversing inequalities. Adopting a mission-oriented, impact-focused approach to address the specific challenges of the call, synergies will be enhanced between the relevant stakeholders through coordinating and supporting the cooperation between teachers, researchers, local communities and other relevant stakeholders (such as policy-makers), in order to generate networks of policy development and to promote the policy uptake of the project.

The aim of the survey was to prepare a social impact analysis that would provide a comprehensive picture of the institutions involved in the project and their environment, with concrete data on the experiences, mindsets, attitudes, goals and concerns of the participants. In more practical terms, based on the results of the attitude test developed for the impact assessment, both stakeholders and intervention programs that aim to improve the situation of disadvantaged groups should focus on addressing the following weaknesses and challenges:



- **Moral values:** Increasing societal immutability (relating both to personal beliefs and sense of efficacy), that is, individuals' beliefs about how change in society is possible.
- **Injustice:** Informing individuals about the existence of social problems, and more importantly, to communicate to individuals that they are part of society and for better or worse, they are involved in and responsible for societal conditions.
- **Efficacy:** Instilling a sense of hope and communicate that activism can be effective in achieving social change and motivate a sense of collective efficacy.
- **Collective action:** Training stakeholders for (preparedly) planning solutions to social problems. When respondents were asked to imagine a specific social problem in school (bullying) which they were asked to solve, majority of the respondents were less responsive, tended less to engage in collective action, namely, found it somewhat difficult to come up with an action/solution plan
- **Attitudes about Roma people** and general prejudice
- **Awareness should be raised to how teachers' perceived warmth toward Roma people is more favourable than perceived competence** and given that it coincides with overprotective attitudes towards Roma school children, it may result in paternalism.
- Increase **empathy and perspective** taking towards Roma people. Empathy is moderately high but not characteristically high, which is unfortunate considering that empathy is known to be a strong motivator for helping and taking collective action for improving the situation of Roma people.
- **Awareness should be raised to teachers (likely) misbelief of personally being free of bias and prejudice.** All people have biases that unconsciously guide their judgment and behaviour; therefore, teachers have them, too, especially when prejudice in society is characteristically high toward certain disadvantaged groups.
- Community: **Increasing sense of local/residential community would be beneficial.** One condition clear from our initial results is that in Hungary, individuals tend to see their friends and family as their primary community, and that sense of residential community is low.

Therefore, in the following months we plan to execute the following steps:

- We continue to collect data among professionals working in schools
- Translate the attitude test to Slovak, and collect data in schools
We collect data among professionals working in NGOs and in the municipality across all countries, using the same attitude test.



4. Project Identity

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Duration: November 2020 – October 2024 (48 months).

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