

## D6.7. Second policy brief



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## 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)	<a href="#">John Wesley Theological College</a>	Hungary
2	<a href="#">Regional Centre for Information and Scientific Development</a>	Hungary
3	<a href="#">C.E.G.A. Foundation</a>	Bulgaria
4	<a href="#">J. Selye University</a>	Slovakia
5	<a href="#">Oltalom Charity Society</a>	Hungary
6	<a href="#">Albanian National Orphans Association</a>	Albania



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## List of abbreviations

D	Deliverable
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RIA	Research and Innovations Actions
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
WP	Work Package





## Preliminary notes about ongoing activities

This policy brief summarises the state-of-the-art and presents preliminary conclusions of three Work Packages (WP) of the Inclusion4Shools project. One of them, WP2, the aim of which is to bring knowledge and policy making together, is very close to its end therefore, the lessons learnt can be considered almost final. WP3, which is mostly field-related and community-based, is approximately in the middle of its implementation. Nonetheless, some features of the moral of its implementation are already visible. The last one, WP4, which foresees strengthening of the professional cooperation on local, national and international levels in the field of inclusive education, is in its initial state of implementation. However, this start is very promising and already demonstrates potential for unifying all policy-producing efforts made by the consortium so far.

### WP2: Think-tanks or conferences with different stakeholders organised in the participating countries of the parallel-running RIAs

Four of the 12 events were organised in the countries covered by the consortium, 4 in the RIA projects' countries and 4 online – 8 EU countries were covered. The think-tank workshops of WP2 were held between April 2022 and January 2023 (altogether 12). A detailed elaboration of the above topics will be included in the D2.2 deliverable.

The main objectives of these activities were to develop ideas and suggestions to enlarge the efficiency of the EU policy concerning social inclusion and to collect recommendations from different professional actors in the field. The project's other intention was to collect suggestions of various professional groups for the developing the methodology for identifying the key factors which lead to segregation. Researchers, policy makers, civil society representatives, municipalities, and teachers (etc.) were asked to discuss specific cases of segregation in a concise continuous study to determine the extent to which their specific local situation was reflected in the statistics available before the research, and whether the statistics are relevant to the direction and magnitude of the national average. Experienced researchers were asked for information on how the data reporting system and the administration's ability to support/hinder the collection of research data changed between 2000 and 2020.

Practically all participants of the discussions have agreed that the approach and methodology – in particular regarding the professional composition of the think-tank groups – provided a unique opportunity to confront different approaches and professional standpoints therefore, they qualified it as highly innovative and revealing.

In general, we can conclude that educational inequalities exist everywhere, both for historical and cultural reasons. Our aim cannot be to eliminate inequalities as such - that would perhaps be too grand or too naive. However, to be able to influence



stakeholders in their decision making process so that they form policy making in a way that can tackle educational inequality in an informed, well-founded, and socially responsible way, it is crucial that empirical data collected through quantitative methodologies (allowing us to construct a comprehensive, wider-level image of the state-of-the-art of society) is made available across Europe in such a way that allows researchers, as well as other stakeholders working with large-scale data to theorise issues of inequality at a structural level - which will at the end inform policymakers to make the right decisions.

As a consequence, all think-tank participants have agreed on the need to conduct large-scale empirical research on educational inequalities both at international and transnational levels, using quantitative research methods. They have also all agreed that the harmonisation of data would be essential to be able to conduct trans- or pan-European research both historically and in terms of country specificities. Overall, our think-tanks were successful in identifying the main issues that need to be addressed in our upcoming work of creating a list of policy recommendations, and they were also successful in bringing together social researchers from around Europe to discuss how we all understand educational inequalities similarly or differently.

Most participants have used PISA, TIMSS, and other international educational surveys to access information about students' social background. Most participants have also collected data from country-specific data sources, such as the Ministry of Education or other administrative entities. However, almost no one has fully used the national censuses to collect data on students' and teachers' immediate and broader social backgrounds, revealing a lack of knowledge about the widespread usability of the censuses in the research of educational inequalities.

The question of data harmonisation has come up in 8 out of 12 think-tanks. Closely connected to comparability issues, data harmonisation seems to be a critical element of working with data. One of the hot topics of the think-tanks was the question of data access, and the GDPR became a catchword that seems to equal 'obstacle in data provision' regardless of location. Interestingly, geographical and geopolitical location seems to be a dividing line in participants' attitudes towards data: while Western European citizens revealed a high level of trust in their national data providers and were generally satisfied with the type and quantity of data available for their work, Eastern European participants were much more reluctant to trust their countries' official data and had revealed available data is 'not enough' and many times 'incomplete' or simply 'unavailable.' Therefore, creating safe spaces (such as the researchers' room at the Central Statistical Office in Hungary), where scientists can do their work (including working with person-level data), may prove to be a successful compromise.

In terms of the comparability of data, participants have indicated that one of the reasons why internationally comparable research is so difficult is the fact that countries differ in what they deem as 'sensitive data', which brings us back to the question of GDPR and individual rights to privacy greatly determining what social research can do to identify structural states of inequality in a broad perspective. A

conceptual and scientifically confirmed transnational definition of what constitutes inequality is almost impossible due to the variety of sensitive data in each country. This is a challenge that needs to be addressed further.

As a general summary, think-tank participants suggested that researchers working with statistical data should have much easier access to different data sources, that quantitative data is needed for comparative longitudinal and geographical research, and for that reason, the harmonisation of data across Europe is a first priority. A Bulgarian think-tank participant made the strong statement in this regard: 'You cannot make responsible state policy without truthful data.'

However, many participants did not actually work with quantitative data, and many were quite sceptical about their value. There were participants who, while recognising the importance of statistical data, argued strongly in favour of the data that can be obtained from qualitative research. These participants tended to argue for the need to emphasise the equal importance of quantitative and qualitative research.

Alongside the scholars, practitioners from the NGO sector, social workers, specialists from the helping sector and school principals, there were also advisers to (local) political decision-making bodies (Albania, Portugal, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Switzerland and Lithuania) and representatives of different denominations working on pastorisation/evangelisation and community building in marginalised communities present at these think-tank events. They were less attached to the statistical/quantitative methodology and clearly expressed their concerns about the exclusivity of the "exact approaches" (census, PISA tests, authorities regulated data collection) in defining the multidimensional character of marginalisation and segregation.

The main problem identified here is that the specialists can select data for ethnicity, religion, and income based on different criteria or indicators, but in reality, people are diverse and identify themselves as a part of multiple 'groups of criteria'. Relying exclusively on the indicators, the experts claim that the surveys would exclude the majority of the people from the general landscape.

The main problem here, as formulated in practically at all think-tanks, is that Roma, and in general other respondents, members of marginalised groups – for historical and political reasons – do not trust the central authorities who collect the data; therefore, they very often provide false information regarding their ethnicity and living conditions. In their opinion, the collected statistical data does not fully show the dimensions of the disadvantage: the matrix can be urban/rural, higher/lower socioeconomic status, ethnic minority/majority background. However, in the majority of the cases, it is not representative because sometimes the exceptions from the expectations are more than the expected outcomes. The data collection is not sensitive to the intersections between the dimensions – and the vast majority gets lost in the system during adolescence for psychological reasons (very often independently from social/ethnic background) because pedagogists do not have efficient tools for coping with their problems. Large scale data is necessary, they say, but the danger is that

they might lead to labelling problems without understanding their complexity. Therefore, data harmonisation does not solve the problem on a local level since different kinds of data are needed for policy-making and different for improving the schooling situation.

All experts involved in the think-tank agreed that even the most benevolent efforts of the central authorities (action plans, strategies, social programs etc.) might become inefficient and formal if the municipalities are not sufficiently motivated and devoted to involving the marginalised communities in the de-segregation process. Three main problems were detected during the discussions: (1) the role of collaboration of the local actors, (2) providing teacher training for local community members and involving them in the anti-segregation activities and (3) the need for financial/logistical support for community-based education activities. The participants representing the bottom-up approach also agreed that the data collected on the sites should be processed centrally, and the outcomes of the research should be shared with the local stakeholders. These results will enable them to decide about further activities and develop local strategies since the national databases, as one Lithuanian expert formulated it 'are useless generalities for a teacher who knows the parents and living conditions of all her pupils but has no idea whom and how to contact if she wants to improve them.'

In summary, the statistical data collection seen from a bottom-up perspective is somewhat problematic, and the census methodologies used among vulnerable communities need fine-tuning and more precise elaboration both in the countries of the EU and outside of it.



## **WP3: Field-related activities: Community building Events and participating in “Open School” Classes, focus group discussions**

### **Community building events**

This WP, as mentioned before, is still in the middle of implementation; nevertheless, the main characteristics, expected results and hardships are already visible. It is also clear that, as concluded in the outcomes of the WP2, one of the main tasks of the future policy research activities will be the further elaboration of methodologies to approach the local disadvantaged and segregated communities and the co-creation of the content for their more efficient integration. So far, in each location of implementation, the project partners have managed to find the most appropriate and stimulating methodologies for creating school communities and further work with them.

The methodological framework of Community building events was elaborated through emails and 10 online WP3 methodology meetings. So far, in the 45 events, more than 900 participants were involved in the four countries (out of a planned 1500). In all locations, the selected methodology is adapted to the local conditions taking into consideration the situation at the school and the participants involved. It is adapted to the group dynamics, respecting all participants (in particular when illiterate Roma parents are attending the events). E.g. the innovative design method of planning steps for reaching a desired future, sketching and modelling a future scenario – the so called back-casting – helps communities to take a step towards such a scenario that they regard desirable. Based on the feedback of the participants, the method which links the data collected in the mapping (i.e., SWOT analysis) to the action planning phase (i.e., small-scale, non-competitive hackathon) proved to be very successful. In all locations, topics were co-created with the schools and this seems to be a key element in the implementation. The other key element is interactivity between the external facilitators and the local participants, based on adaptation to the local conditions - the size of the community, internal conflicts in the community, relations between the school and the institutions: municipality, community centre, social services, as well as the attitude / support of the principal and the relations within the teaching team. The events should tackle problems clearly important for the communities, e.g.: bullying, drug addiction, parent-child communication etc. The involvement of local trainers/facilitators and or participation of educators of Roma ethnicity substantially raises the level of trust of the participants. One of the biggest challenges in building a community of supporters around the school is the lack of cooperation between educational institutions and other actors – cultural institutions, social services, child protection, health care etc.. And this is true at all levels - from ministries to municipal level structures. The involvement of a local civil society organisation is an asset since it can play the role of the unifying factor that works with all the institutions.

Therefore, one of the main policy tasks for the future is motivating the local authorities to cooperate with NGOs and facilitate the self-mobilisation of different segments of the local communities (e.g., parents' associations, self-help communities etc.). This might help overcome difficulties of the involvement of parents in the community building event. The other major obstacle is the reluctance of the schools or, more precisely, the teachers to actively participate in these events since they consider their presence as extra unpaid work. This can be solved by closer cooperation of the NGOs and trainers with the educational authorities, or school chairs can compensate teachers for their extra time spent with trainings.

Therefore, in the next stage of the implementation, the consortium experts will do their best to open up cross-sectoral communication and mutual support on behalf of children. In the forthcoming activities, where larger-scale events are planned, we count on the fact that both institutions and parents will be more involved and active, and a real step will be made for future joint work in the interest of children.

### **Open Schools Classes**

Open School Classroom events have been held in each partner country though the implementation is still in its initial stage (3-4 events per country). The themes of these Open Schools are initiated during the community building meetings and are important for all participants: teachers, parents, and representatives of the local community. In formulating the themes, the Inclusion4Schools expert strive, in addition to making them beneficial to all participants, to influence a change in attitudes towards tolerance and to incorporate elements of the participants' knowledge with expertise.

What is visible even at this stage of implementation is that educational professionals should encourage the extension of education beyond the 'school walls' and participate in community activities, so as to improve public relations in order to make a joint effort to fight early dropout and to cooperate with experts and volunteers who help students with special needs within the school-community network. The 'outreach' process also opens schools to the community and cultivates formal and informal interaction and exchange of social-cultural resources between schools and communities to jointly accumulate clearly identifiable social and cultural capital, by making use of the multiplication effect generated within the network.

Activities in the school-community network include at least a series of three discussion sessions to identify further local educational issues with precision.

Open classes provide a safe and relaxed space to discuss matters of education in schools without any prejudice and precedence of one actor over the other. Actors involved should be interested persons in education, minority rights, policy making etc., beneficiaries, local and national government representatives, civil society organizations' representatives, school principals and teachers, school psychologist and/or social workers, individual activists and parents' representatives.

The OSC methodology and concept are particularly efficient in locations where the situation is delicate. An excellent example for this is the case of a school in Albania that had just been declared as segregated school by the European Human Rights Court. Consequently, at this point the audience was very sensitive, while the school principal was very interested in finding possible solutions to address segregation at her school by using initially the measures provided by the law in terms of registration. They had also started a debate on changing the administrative division so that the accumulation of Roma happens not only in one school.

### **Focus group events**

The focus group component of the WP3 has recently started, and four events have been conducted so far. Thus, there are only few definable policy related observations connected to this segment.

The demand for policy development strictly drawn from social research in education producing particularly qualitative data is almost non-existent. This hiatus makes it also go unnoticed that the scientific terminology is missing; consequently the discussions in education research circles are often misleading or irrelevant. Therefore, the aim of the focus groups is to promote dialogue between teachers and academics including classical pedagogues, lecturers in social pedagogy, teaching in multicultural environments, methodologists in certain subjects - history, geography as well as primary teachers, teachers with different profiles (e.g., information and computer technologies) to develop specialised university programmes at two levels: for students, future teachers, and for the qualification of teachers working in disadvantaged schools.

At this stage, there are two main conclusions we can assume:

- Involving teachers in research and policy development, thus initiating the recognition of their agency as professionals. It can be a policy matter, though universities should take the initiative.
- Launching several series of workshops with the purpose of clarifying and establishing a commonly agreed terminology as a combined effort involving researchers, tutors, teachers – preferably in an interdisciplinary setting.



## WP3 and WP4: Professional work online

### Knowledge Sharing Portal and its relevance to the further EU policies

The portal collects schools, institutions, non-profit organizations and initiatives dealing with segregated and disadvantaged students and inclusion. It intends to bring together several target groups within the topic: teachers, researchers, schools, civilians, higher education institutions. All information that appears on the portal is immediately made available currently in 5 (later at least in 15) languages and not only provides information, but is also suitable for joint work, thinking, building relationships and networks. New functions also mean that the portal will reach and motivate a new target group - researchers, higher education institutions - to participate. This will be the challenge of the next period, while it is still a task to find the arguments that will expand the presentation of schools and good practices.

The <https://i4sportal.movelex.hu/login?lang=en> will be available from May 2023 with workshop function - an interface suitable for joint work and thinking, the results of which are also stored on the portal; document library - a collection of research and writings related to the topic; building relationships - institutions, good practices, accessing and searching for document authors, workshop and project partners reaching directly from the portal etc.

The main challenge is to reach a participation rate where it will be prestigious to appear on the portal and the participants will not be aware of the unpredictable reactions of the educational authorities (as the situation is now). The final goal is to develop the most complex professional hub in the field of anti-segregation policies and become the most recommended site by the related EU institutions. This is likely to guarantee the feeling of security in all countries with highly centralised educational system.

### Online Methodological Workshops to develop analysis and evaluation methodology

This project segment is also in a very initial stage. The seminars are realized in the form of an online Moodle LMS in which the participants familiarize themselves with the method of SSE as distinct from either an external or internal evaluation procedure mandatory by law. The main areas for evaluation are given and the participants are asked to pick specific issues and problems, practices, phenomena, obstacles, difficulties, which – in their understanding – needs change in their own schools/institutions.

Even at this early stage of implementation the difficulties and the related (possible) policy recommendations are visible to a certain extent. Autonomy, choice and decision making are not encouraged in schools within a top-down education system, and without relying on a sound policy on education. In Hungary, where the seminars were first launched, there is no organization which would provide research and policy for the decision makers in politics. Therefore, for instance, the participants have found it

difficult to grasp the logic of SSE – the foundation of which is action research – as a different one from the mandatory internal evaluation procedure, presumably because they are not accustomed to act autonomously.

Based on this the expected recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- There are no courses in the teacher education curricula of universities on evaluation at the level of organisations, only the evaluation of individuals – students and teachers – are discussed. Therefore, we strongly suggest the inclusion of such courses which discuss the significance of evaluation as a springboard for improvement and effectiveness of schools as organizations.
- Also, in service teacher development courses should be offered in this area of knowledge and competences.
- Research on the existing legally bounding types of school evaluation would be of importance to find out if they are following the OECD and EU recommendations.
- Interdisciplinary and qualitative research is of importance to map the reality of schools to find ways to provide realistic practical support to schools with multiple disadvantages in order that they become versed to design and realize their pedagogical work to the benefit of their pupils.