Inclusion4Schools

D3.3. School-University Partnership and Recommendations to Teacher Training Institutes

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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 pervasively fearful milieu 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 –walls of exclusion (imaginary, symbolic, and actual) which are based on class, ethnicity, gender, etc. and intended to segregate children –and –to divide and alienate 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, this 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, and solidarity between such communities, by bringing together local, regional and transnational communities.

The expected impact of the proposed project is to contribute to the European initiatives and interventions that aim to reverse inequality. 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	Regional Centre for Information and Scientific Development	Hungary
2	John Wesley Theological College	Hungary
3	C.E.G.A. Foundation	Bulgaria
4	J. Selye University	Slovakia
5	Oltalom Charity Society	Hungary
6	Albanian National Orphans Association	Albania

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
CSA	Coordination and Support Action
D	Deliverable
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GA	General Agreement
I4S	Inclusion4Schools
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
WP	Work Package

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Introduction

Inclusion4Schools is a 4-year-long Coordination and Support Action (CSA) aiming to foster and promote pedagogical relations of inclusion, a culture of dialogue, and the transformation of unjust structures through education. The project strives against the logic of exclusion in education and against the systemic (re)production of inequalities insisting on a bottom-up strategy – in the context of segregated schools and communities.

Interaction between the actors of the education system, including academics, policy makers, teachers, and a variety of relevant professionals makes it possible to share theoretical knowledge, informed policies and locally developed techniques and methods which are successful in improving the students' educational progress in school. Within the I4S project, events for sharing views and discussing issues emerging from different experiences are the tools for moving forward, encouraging experimentation and innovation, which are expected to lead to change.

The focus group discussions represent a structured and contained form of dialoguing, mainly between academics and teachers, on how and where their cooperation can foster the introduction of practices which can result in quality education for pupils with various social, cultural and educational needs.

Rationale and Justification

The rationale behind fostering a shift towards inclusive education is that schools need to cater to a heterogeneous society. Inclusive pedagogy can be practised in an education system which accommodates all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, cultural, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. Highlighting inclusive education entails pedagogical practices that develop opportunities for formal and informal learning, and ensuring core social justice.

The inclusive and transformative approach requires that teachers, other educators, non-teaching support staff, the community, and parents are consenting participants in offering their share to students' academic progress. Initial and in-service teacher education should therefore also be involved in developing adequate pedagogies as well as preparing trainee teachers to function meaningfully in an inclusive educational environment. Research has a role of documenting activities and procedures which show beneficial results, as well as developing ways to measure the impact of inclusive and quality education.

Recommendations to Teacher Training Institutions

School-university partnerships are complex and multi-dimensional settings requiring the scrutiny of the many roles and relationships that bring the two institutions together. School-university partnerships can enrich both parties through the exchange of resources and ideas. Avoiding top-down arrangements in favour of greater mutuality and more intensive interaction is advised.

Based on the outcomes of the FGDs of the I4S WP3 Task 3.3, the following recommendations should be considered and discussed by the universities and institutions providing teacher training:

I4S Recommendations to Teacher Training Institutions

1. Emphasize Multidisciplinary Knowledge

2. Foster Acquiring Teacher Competencies via Hands on Experience

3. Incorporate Leadership and Organizational Management

4. Promote Collaboration in Research

5. Enrich and Diversify Teaching Practice

1. **Emphasize Multidisciplinary Knowledge**

The **multidisciplinary features of education science and pedagogy should be accentuated**. This creates a **knowledge base for teachers** that can be transformed into pedagogical activities **answering the needs of pupils of schools located in a spectrum of social and cultural environments**, including schools in unprivileged surroundings and even in segregated settings. It is crucial to incorporate disciplines providing prospective teachers the knowledge and skills for diagnosing the root causes of student challenges, whether coming from individual ability gaps, psychological factors, or unfavourable social circumstances. These disciplines might include sociology, cultural anthropology, ethnic studies, minority studies, gender studies, communication theories, philosophy (ethics, axiology), political science, organisation management, legal studies, human rights studies, etc.

Schoolteachers in all FGDs urged for novice teachers to be prepared to function in situations that general pedagogical and subject methodology knowledge and competencies alone do not sufficiently cover. A wider, multidisciplinary scope of competencies ensures teachers will act competently, instead of denying the existence of problematic situations and denying their responsibility in finding solutions.

2. **Foster Acquiring Teacher Competencies via Hands on Experience**

When focusing on teachers' professional capacities, teacher education should develop strategies for the **clear and precise understanding and acquisition of teachers' competencies as distinct from competence and attitude**. The analyses of case studies, observations in schools, etc. are proposed so that trainee teachers may experience professional competencies in action while facing a wide variety of challenges. **A partnership group – e.g. joint case study group with schoolteachers – should be set up for developing the methodology** of this task. **Documenting teachers' hands-on experience should be regular, enabling the development of a resource library for university students.**

Based on the content of the Hungarian and Bulgarian FGDs, both the participating teachers – especially mentor teachers - and university tutors presented examples of such partnership groups already in practice. They described their experiences in these groups as empowering, both in effectively contributing to their knowledge and in creating a platform for professional communication with relevant stakeholders.

3. Incorporate Leadership and Organizational Management

Universities providing teacher education should initiate study groups including university tutors, university students, schoolteachers and school principals to **embark on including a new knowledge and skills area toward mastering leadership and organisational management**. The organisation of a school can best be understood as a set of overlapping systems: the student system, the faculty system, the parent system, the administration system. An exemplary school climate can be seen as **facilitating communication** among these systems. This description leads to **a detailed understanding of the scope of activities and responsibilities of persons belonging to these sub-systems. Universities should take part in both the planning and evaluation activities of schools.**

The understanding of schools as organizations was brought up in the FGDs when discussing school autonomy in decision making. In the four participating countries, levels of school autonomy are different, scaling from almost totally centralized education systems, where it is difficult to practice autonomy (Bulgaria, Hungary), to a system in which autonomy is considered a factor detracting from transparency, and not as an opportunity for initiating (local and policy) development (Albania). The Slovak case represents a hybrid system. The basis for any innovation and development in schools is an evaluation of the current "state of affairs", and then producing a plan for development. These activities require both theoretical and methodological knowledge. Hence the recommendation of including the subject in the teacher education curriculum. (A school self-evaluation seminar is realized in WP4 Task 1.1. of the I4S project.)

4. Promote Collaboration in Research

Universities providing teacher education should **invite teachers to collaborate in research projects, especially in those targeting scientific enquiry into understanding how schools operate, how teachers define their profession, what values shape school cultures, etc.** Research should also be linked with action in schools. **This requires social research methods being introduced as part of teacher education.** In order to precisely identify research topics and to later develop plans for inquiry, **the terminology used in both theory and practice should be consistent.** This in itself calls for large scale research using a variety of methods. However, the results will strengthen reliability of both research and professional communication on education. **Consistent terminology can also assist to single out those areas which persistently lack research.**

In all four participating countries, the contents and requirements of trainee teachers' internship period were deemed problematic in the FGDs. Apart from teaching practice in the students' subject area, this same issue was raised by schoolteachers and students (in Hungary), namely that the remaining practice period requires familiarization with school administrative tasks. Suggestions were made that trainee students should be more involved in investigating pedagogical issues, given tasks in which they work with pupils and with other teachers (than their mentor teacher). It was pointed out that exploitation of trainee students' academic knowledge could be put to work, and they should be given free hand in planning and executing small scale research projects, the results of which the school can utilize in their own evaluation and planning processes. This would benefit both trainee students and schools.

5. **Enrich and Diversify Teaching Practice**

Students' teaching practice should be understood as a sub-system in education which includes **participants with distinct roles from different institutions.** For the successful outcome of activities within the sub-system, **regular and regulated interaction, cooperation and communication is necessary. For trainee student teachers to acquire and practise their required professional competencies, and to familiarise themselves with all the activities of a well-functioning school in any social environment, guidance from both the tutors in academia and the teachers in schools is essential. This requires a detailed shared strategy.** It is not only the trainee students who have tasks and responsibilities, but all parties involved must perform in their relevant roles. **For smooth operation during this period of teacher education, it is necessary to produce detailed action plans, with all the parties as responsible actors in their preparation.**

The contents of the action plan should be complex, reflecting the diversity present in the reality of any education system, so that the trainee teachers could try themselves in challenging situations. In three of the FGDs (Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania) the issue of trainee teachers' isolation in schools was brought up by the university tutors. They expressed criticism towards the practice of trainee students working and communicating almost exclusively with their assigned mentor teachers. Schools do not student presence and work as an opportunity to exploit his/her knowledge, e.g. by assigning extracurricular activities or twinning them with pupils needing mentoring. Student teachers should also be invited to staff meetings.

The implementation of these recommendations can lead to more effective teacher training, to better teacher preparation, and ultimately to improvement of educational outcomes for students.

Conceptualisation for the Focus Group Discussions

Task 3.3 Support for school-university partnership – Activity 3.3.3 Organizing online focus-group meetings and interviews of WP3 of the I4S project addresses what the most effective arrangements for school-university partnerships are, contributing to enhancing the quality of pedagogy teachers performing in atypical schools generally, and in schools with disadvantaged pupils in segregated schools particularly. It is crucial to address the issue – problematized and discussed in international studies as well, that academic work in university teacher education is not fully informed by the empirical practical experience of teachers working in schools, due to the unequal status of institutions within the respective education systems. Teacher training curricula tend to be predominantly based on theoretical research, and as a result they offer insufficient reflection on the everyday experiences of teachers or the learning needs of students in schools.

Teachers' work in schools is defined by the quality of their professional education, by the educational authorities' regulations, by the ethos/local culture of the schools, as well as by the educational needs of the pupils. The latter are shaped by a wide scope of characteristics including socioeconomic status, family configuration, geographical location, ethnicity, religion, language, traditions, cultural values, gender, disabilities, special educational needs, etc.

Therefore, the aim of developing school-university partnerships is to explore and develop such participatory work forms which present the university students with an opportunity to engage in community and school activities, to gain practical experience and link theory to practice in their specific fields of study. **I4S efforts in mediating the establishing of school-university partnerships include inviting university tutors, researchers, school directors, and schoolteachers to get involved in focus-group discussions, in order to share knowledge, views and experiences.** Based on discussion outcomes we anticipate encouraging further dialogue between these stakeholders. This approach is informed by the following understanding of professional knowledge: "There is a growing awareness of *tacit* and *procedural* knowledge as opposed to *explicit* and *declarative* knowledge and there is also a growing attention paid to work-based and horizontal learning from peers in communities of practice". (Halász, 2016)[1]

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[1] School-university partnership for effective teacher learning. Issues Paper for the seminar co-hosted by ELTE Doctoral School of Education and Miskolc-Hejőkeresztúr KIP Regional Methodological Centre, May 13, 2016. Prepared by Gabor Halász ELTE University Faculty of Education and Psychology.

I4S also proposes and encourages that joint empirical research in schools should be carried out with the purpose of integrating the results of school ethnography, case studies, action research, etc. into the courses of teacher education, thus updating the courses and eventually the curricula of teacher education to be relevant to the current educational landscape.[2]

School-university partnership should be built on reciprocity, interaction and mutual respect, the inclusion of a participatory approach and a mutual decision-making process that helps address imbalances with the collaborators, and a recognition of values that each partner brings to the relationship.
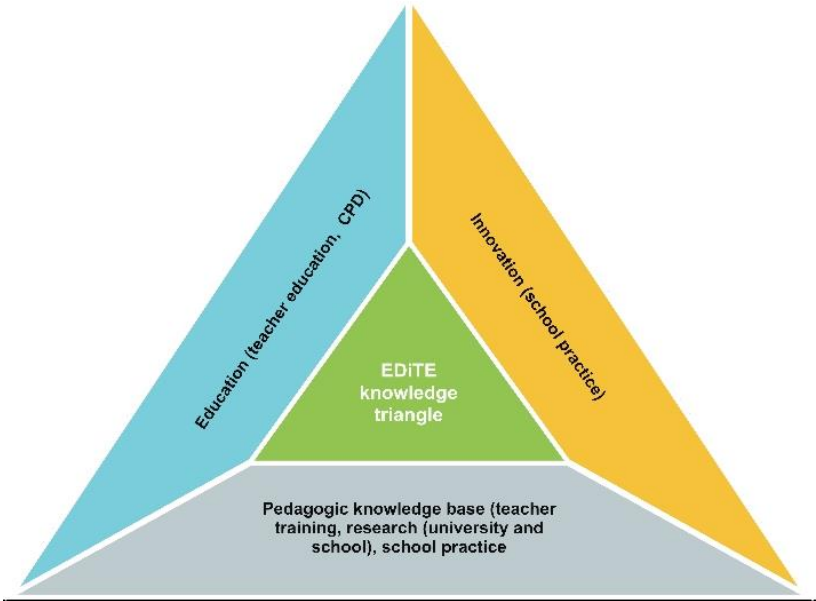

Figure 1. The "knowledge triangle" of teacher education

Source: School-university Partnership Insights from an International Doctorate Program on Teacher Education. EDiTE project, 2020.

When focusing on disadvantaged and segregated schools, the collaboration of public education professionals and academia professionals (in any field) will create spaces where new resources are made available for both parties. Schools will be given the opportunity to keep up with new knowledge production, while universities will obtain first-hand experience in finding out about the local educational needs of students in schools which operate in segregated communities. The expected outcome of their collaboration is a harmonization of what universities offer and what the public schools need, forwarding the process of empowerment through education.

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[2] Walsh, M. E., & Backe, S. (2013). School-University Partnerships: Reflections and Opportunities. Peabody Journal of Education, 88(5), 594–607.

To map the current situation, a small-scale survey was developed and carried out seeking information and data about formal theoretical training content currently in place at the teacher training institutions, and what practical programmes or procedures are in place to sensitise and professionally prepare student teachers to work in schools with multiple disadvantages. Two consortium members provided ample information from universities. Survey answers have revealed that all responding institutions have courses on multicultural education and inclusive pedagogy – most institutions have research projects which include the issue of diversity and pedagogy for socially unprivileged pupils. However, none of the institutions offer school practice in atypical schools.

As a next step, focus-group discussions of education professionals (both in public and higher education) were organized to provide grounds for exploring current professional practices, as well as views and attitudes of those concerned in the field. This information provided a basis for initiating further discussions between the parties to develop frameworks aiming to formalize procedures and competencies arising from collaborative efforts of school-university partnerships for pedagogical purposes. The formalization process aimed at ensuring that new knowledge would enrich the knowledge base of a variety of academic fields and disciplines. It was anticipated that these focus-group meetings would be followed up with specific actions, and long-term joint programme development between universities and segregated schools, with networking providing a gateway toward formal collaboration at a later stage. See WP3 Task 3.2 of the I4S project.

Based on the contents of these discussions, it was additionally decided that within the I4S project recommendations would be formulated for improving school-university partnerships that enhance and to support the pre-service student teachers' school practice experience in diverse settings.

The rationale to employ FGDs as a forum for sharing views and experiences is that focus-group discussions are significantly more effective when participants are requested to provide their specific on-topic opinions in a group setting. FGD is a qualitative research method and data collection technique in which a selected group of people discusses a given topic or issue in-depth, facilitated by a professional external moderator. This method serves to solicit participants' attitudes and perceptions, knowledge and experiences, and practices, shared in the course of interactions. The technique is based on the assumption that the group processes activated during an FGD help identify and clarify shared knowledge among groups and communities, which would otherwise be difficult to obtain during a series of individual interviews. Rather, an FGD allows the investigator to solicit both the participants' shared narrative as well as their differences in terms of experiences and opinions.

In all FDGs, taking place between October 2022 and September 2023, the same questions were introduced, so that the discussion transcripts could be used in a detailed analysis carried out at a later stage.

Questions were developed by Wesley experts. Participants had the opportunity to raise new issues and questions. The following topics and questions were formulated for discussion:

- What criteria would you apply to determine whether a school is disadvantaged? How can ethnography be part of the exploration?
- How can educational progress and achievement be characterized in disadvantaged schools?
- Who are the key professionals, and what are their responsibilities to instigate change in a disadvantaged school?
- How can the method of action research be used to introduce transformative practices? How can needs analysis be carried out in segregated school?
- What qualities – knowledge, skills and dispositions – should a teacher possess to be able to take part in improving education in a segregated school?
- What changes should be made in the academic content of teacher education so that understanding social-cultural contexts and children's rights become relevant along with standard knowledge transfer?
- What collaborative partners may universities need other than academic institutions?
- What kind of specialisation could be integrated into the modified curriculum of teacher education?

Selecting and Recruiting Participants for the Focus Group Discussions

In consortium countries, universities, schools, and experts were approached directly through emails and phone calls.

10 participants were expected per event, teachers, university tutors and university students of teacher training education. On average, 13 persons participated in each session, at a range of smaller and larger, events, thus we achieved our overall project target in this respect.

Recruiting participants - especially from universities – faced unexpected difficulties. This reflects the reticence of university tutors to interact with schoolteachers, especially on sensitive topics, i.e. contents and methods which are essential for teachers working with pupils with special educational needs, but which university tutors are not required to include in their research activities and teacher training courses. Because of this, for example in Hungary, several universities turned down the invitation. To solve this problem, the Hungarian consortium member, Wesley, invited the Association of Teacher Trainers to become co-organisers of a workshop.

The details of university tutors' participation, therefore, is informative for our purposes:

- Albania: tutors from 2 universities
- Bulgaria: tutors from 2 universities
- Hungary: tutors from 3 universities and members of the Association of Teacher Trainers, coming from further 3 universities
- Slovakia: tutors from 2 universities

Altogether, on the project level, 33 teachers, 25 university students enrolled in teacher training, and 39 tutors from universities took part in the focus group discussions.

Scheduling meetings also represented some challenge, because of the variety of responsibilities and the differences in working hours of those interested. This was particularly an issue when in-person meetings were organized, instead of online.

Dates and Participation Numbers of the FGD Events

Ten events were organized in four consortium countries.

No	Date	Location	Partners involved	Participants
1	24 October 2022	online Hungary	Wesley	7
2	23 November 2022	online Hungary	Wesley	16
3	24 November 2022	in-person Elbasan Albania	ANOA	10
4	16 December 2022	in-person Sofia Bulgaria	CEGA	8
5	8 February 2023	online Hungary	Wesley (and TKSZ by invitation)	24
6	10 February 2023	in-person Sofia, Bulgaria	CEGA	8
7	1 March 2023	online Hungary	Wesley	23
8	13 April 2023	online Albania	ANOA	10
9	September 2023	in-person Bratislava	Selye	10
10	September 2023	in-person Nitra	Selye	8

Discourses and Narratives Emerging from Focus Group Discussions and Workshop

Preliminary Notes on Outcome Reliability

1. In-person and online formats of the discussions revealed somewhat divergent outcomes. Offline discussions tended to foster more interactive exchanges than their online counterparts. However, the range of results was also influenced by factors such as moderation style and participant backgrounds and personal attitudes.

2. Discussion content, scope and the depth were substantially determined by the number of participants. Fewer participants yielded discussions containing more personal narratives and views rather than pointing out major issues and seeking or proposing actions leading to solutions. In terms of forming co-actions, sharing pedagogical methods, organization of events for further discussions, shaping school culture, etc., these could be incorporated in their work.

3. Except for one Hungarian event, for all other events the "composition" of the participants was uneven; in some cases, university tutors outnumbered teachers working in schools and vice versa.

4. It is apparent that in all FGDs, dialogues were not taking place between tutors and teachers, rather parallel monologues on the subjects were offered. The reason for this was not articulated. Therefore, it can be merely postulated that power and prestige gaps between the social positions of university tutors and schoolteachers in a broader social setting would also be present in professional education communities.

5. FGDs' research questions (see above) served as analytical dimensions for data processing. Transcribed texts were grouped under these dimensions serving as nodes for thematic analysis. Special attention was paid to discourses and narratives.

6. When starting WP3 Activity 3.3.3 of the I4S project, the method of FGD was described in detail in the concept note, including the significance of producing transcripts from which reliable data can be extracted. Producing transcripts of the FGDs was required for the purpose of accessing the full content of the discussions, to identify the use of terminology, discussion dynamics, nuanced distinctions whether speakers were expressing personal views, professional experiences and professional knowledge, etc. In the case of certain FGDs, reports were prepared instead of transcripts. These reports already reflect a certain consideration of

selection, and focus on content; therefore, they conceal such communicational features as turn-taking, speaker attitudes, etc.

Identification of Factors Rendering a School Disadvantaged

a. **In all of the FGDs, proposed criteria were almost identical. The main determining factor was the geographical location of a school away from the centre, in isolated and economically deprived areas of the countries. This factor entails an isolated socio-cultural status of parents and their children from the country's mainstream of social, cultural and educational opportunities, resulting in a lack of choices, including interests, role-models, cultural settings, career aspirations, etc. Typically, minority ethnicity is coupled with underprivileged social status.** In sum, status intersectionality of both school as an institution and pupils as persons was identified, and the term *intersectionality* was used by one university tutor. The other introduced the phenomenon using longer or partial descriptions. The Slovak discussion of the question focused on pupils' Roma ethnic identity as a cultural context leading to segregation.

b. Additionally, **teachers' isolation was pointed out, which causes teachers to lose professional contacts and opportunities to take part in the current discourses** in pedagogy and education policy. Thus, they fall back on routines, rather than experimenting with new approaches and methods.

c. **The prejudiced attitude of some teachers was also problematised as adding to a school's status as an organisation**: "We need to have sufficient self-awareness, to recognise our deep-seated prejudices, or the kind of paternalism or the kind of values that we trust as our own"[3]. (Source: Interview, Slovakia)

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[3] All the quotes in this section and the subsequent ones are taken from the transcripts and reports of the relevant FGDs.

d. The above-described attitude of teachers may prevail, since awareness raising does not take place in teacher training to develop teachers' sound understanding of the consequences of pupils' underprivileged status in society: "the university curriculum is not at all concerned with the problem of deprivation and segregation". **Because of the lack of school-university connections, trainee teachers typically spend their internship period in elite or "normal" schools.** (Source: FGD, Bulgaria)

7. In the Bulgarian FGDs the **use of terminology for describing the schools attended by pupils who live in disadvantaged circumstances was brought up as an obstacle for developing a consistent and professionally meaningful discourse on educational research and on developing educational intervention plans for improvement.** The stigmatization of institutions and individuals has an adverse effect, sending a message to the general public that it is "natural" that poverty should exist in societies.

a. In two Hungarian FGDs, the overrepresentation of Roma pupils was explained by two factors: having a large number of pupils who are in foster care, and **non-Roma parents' reaction to the presence of Roma pupils in a school when taking their children to other schools in another town**: "It is not us who segregate, it is the parents who segregate, and they take away their children to another school."

Interpretations of Progress and Achievement in a Disadvantaged School

The issues of progress, achievements and success stirred up considerable interest, and raised disputes as to how these can be relevant with pupils experiencing a whole package of disadvantages. **Participant contributions reflect an unusually diverse way of thinking about and interpreting progress and success.**

a. A concise and broad understanding was expressed in one of the Hungarian FGDs: "Social mobilisation (…) starting their life in a more stable and somewhat safer environment and career than their parents." It was also added that in schooling terms, this can be achieved by exposing pupils to a variety of experiences inside and outside of school, as a group but also as individuals with different needs and interests. A conducive and safe school environment was also pointed out as a means for supporting pupil achievement: **"It's our responsibility to create an environment for our students where they can live happily and grow every day at their own level and in the way they want to."**

b. In the other two Hungarian FGDs, diversion or reinterpreting the question took place so that the notions of **academic progress and achievement were substituted by achievements and successes in other areas, namely in music and sports activities. The groups arrived at the general conclusion that since music is a "natural" part of Roma culture, it may be used as an incentive for the pupils to come to school as "they are talented in music and dance, so they are given a sense of achievement in performances".** This view clearly reflected an absence of a concept for successful Roma persons/pupils in the academic sense. **The stereotypical choice of activities may be helpful for relating to pupils as children growing up in a Roma community. On the other hand, it is problematically limiting equipping pupils with skills which enable them to function outside their own immediate environment.** In this case, a professional approach was substituted by a benevolent attitude, which triggers a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those who share this attitude lack knowledge in or misinterpret the concepts of multicultural education. (Courses on multicultural education are part of teacher education.)

c. In one Albanian FGD, participants looked at the issue from a policy point of view. They agreed that state standards cannot be lowered, therefore there must be other solutions. Most importantly "good teachers should be encouraged to go to these schools". They did not expand on what qualities constitute a good teacher, or how those teachers could be invited, other than offering financial incentives. **Employing other professionals than teachers was also proposed. It was also suggested that the school should set specific and measurable objectives, to see the progress, which should be done in small and accessible steps.** This way, with the cooperation of everyone, progress will be achieved step by step. In one Slovak FGD, it was pointed out that "there is a need to monitor pupils' improvement in performance from the moment they enter the school, and to compare this with expected progress based on their age and baseline ability." This process also includes **managing relationships between pupils, teachers and parents, guiding social and emotional development, and improving communication and interpersonal skills.**

d. The other Albanian FGD switched the focus from achievements to failures, and to the investigation of what the causes of failure are in education, discussing the school's performance rather than its pupils'. They concluded that an indicator of a 'failure school' can be low results in national exams, as well as a high turnover of teaching staff. In sum, **school management was singled out, the quality of which determines pupils' achievements.** This understanding should be discussed further in order to draw attention to the abundance of factors which determine individual pupil progress. Participants agreed that **the role of principals/directors is extremely important regarding school atmosphere, teacher commitment and inspiration, and that "a good principal can do a lot, while a principal who does not make efforts to bring the team together can turn even elite school into a failing one".**

Key Professionals' Contribution to Instigate Change

There was an overall consensus in all four consortium countries that most of the problems faced by segregated and disadvantaged schools stem from the series of unfavourable stances and their impact on children in their local social environment. It could have been predicted that in FGDs, professionals whose expertise is identifying and remedying problems induced by deprivation would be called on. However, participants' views took a different path, for reasons to be investigated further. It can be hypothesised that **teachers may perceive the involvement of other professionals as a threat to their own positions, even when they are aware that they do not possess knowledge and competencies to deal with the situation** at hand.

a. In all four countries, FGD participants suggested that the main responsibility falls on teachers and school directors/principals. Professionals such as social workers, psychologist, educational mediators (in BG), and assistant teachers should be employed to help. But first, **the solution entails augmenting human resources by employing assistant teachers and moving towards personalized learning according to the abilities of individual students, and this could be achieved by having specialized teachers.**

b. According to a persuasive argument in one of the Bulgarian discussions, **improvement and change depend on the school director's leadership qualities**: "The decisive role of the director is especially emphasized. When a director is very good, many things happen, they gather the right team, motivate their people. Where this is not present, good teachers leave demotivated, if they don't leave, they stop trying as hard. This is a problem at a systemic level, there needs to be a higher level of decentralization, and better opportunities for the school community to assert positions, rather than having things depend on one person."

c. Another path to resolve the issue of professionals was avoiding discussing specific expertise, by arguing that **it is the responsibility of high-quality education policies to include tasks and roles which can only be performed by other professionals than teachers.**

d. There was only one remark in one Hungarian FGD, in which it was stated that **"there are a lot of co-disciplines that could be involved, e. g. working with organizations from communities in our social environments, culture and surroundings, formal and informal organizations".**

e. In one Slovak FGD, the **responsibility of local, national governments** and professional governing bodies was also emphasized.

Teachers' Qualities Needed in Segregated Schools

The proposed issue named knowledge, skills and dispositions to be discussed. However, in most discussions **the contributions referred to personality traits rather than professional repertoires, to the competencies and knowledge of competent teachers in a segregated school.** When considering the significance of how teachers reflect on their work and on their professional preparedness to perform complex pedagogical tasks, it may be a concern that discussions on teachers' qualities were sparse, only sporadic elements were proposed.

a. **Empathy, open-mindedness, respect, patience, flexibility, emotional support, kindness, being ethical, being close to the pupils were the qualities that were mentioned in most FGDs.** No conversation developed on the issue that terminology should be clarified first, i.e. reaching a common understanding of what counts as competency and what counts as personality trait and attitude.

b. In one Hungarian and in one Albanian FGD however, when teacher participants shared experience cases and explained their choice of methods for solving them, they named several competencies, such as conflict resolution, identification of learning style and social competence (in broad terms). There were several "sub-discussions" on **the issue of the teaching profession becoming a social and helping profession, which entails that teachers themselves need to continue to learn, and to develop their own personality and creative powers.** "This is the only way to avoid routine, monotony, and to be able to stimulate learners continuously."

c. As for knowledge, **intercultural education and inclusive education were featured as educational knowledge areas necessary for functioning as a competent teacher in a segregated school in all FGDs.** In one Slovak FGD, it was proposed that **teachers should have the theoretical and practical multidisciplinary knowledge allowing them to understand the ethnic, linguistic, cultural or social structure of a given locality and to gradually map pupil family backgrounds. Teachers should also be familiar with the legal and historical causes of the emergence of a segregated environment:** "Emphasis in university teacher training should be placed on intercultural education, inclusive education. With sporadic courses, optional subjects, the necessary competences cannot be sufficiently developed in this direction."

d. In the realm of psychology, **knowledge of developmental psychology, working with boundaries, emotional health, tolerance, flexibility, psychological resilience, as well as openness to new perspectives and challenges have been identified as necessary dispositions.** One of the Slovak participants suggested "It is important to adopt a success-oriented approach to teaching, that seeks to overcome the permanent sense of loss that results from disadvantaged situations. **Only an innovative teacher has a chance to change local bad habits and "traditions". Of course, this can only begin after mapping the local conditions and finding allies."**

e. In one of the Bulgarian FGDs, there was a statement in which several competencies were implied; however, the quote suggests that specialists are needed with special educational knowledge: **"The pedagogical advisor can be a very serious support to the class teacher. He/she can help with the initial diagnosis of the children, can point out deficits in the social and emotional sphere to start supporting children from the beginning.** Both school hygienist and support staff, they also talk and communicate with students, setting a personal example with the way they work. They can also serve as mediators, especially if they are from the community and speak the respective mother tongue." (in Bulgaria) It raises the question what competencies class teachers should possess if even the initial diagnosis is handed over to a specialist. It should also be noted that this response was voiced when the teachers' competencies were discussed, whereas it fits more with the question referring to other professionals than teachers in education.

Changes to be Made in the Academic Content of Teacher Education

a. Common denominators in the FGDs were such academic subjects as are already included in the curricula of teacher education: *Intercultural education*, *Multicultural education* and *Inclusive education*. However, it was pointed out that they should not be dealt with as separate theoretical subjects, but **"it is important to integrate such issues into different subjects as a horizontal principle"**.

b. In addition to the above, *Social work, Social inequalities, Drama pedagogy, Differentiated organisation in the classroom, Interaction with the family, Children's rights, Roma studies* **as distinct subjects were proposed**. Subjects should enable learning to develop social competence and emotional intelligence in children. Interaction with the family as an academic subject was not explained. It may be deduced that effective communication skills are needed to be acquired, so as to be successful in communication with confidence and professional authority, while requiring astute listening skills as well.

c. In one Hungarian FGD, the discussion included a debate on how education science and/or pedagogy can be described as a scientific discipline. The starting point of the debate was a statement from a university student claiming that **"pedagogy is multidisciplinary in principle", therefore we should include a wider range of other disciplines which can provide theories and concepts for understanding and analysing the structures, discourses, practices in education, as well as school cultures, or pupils' backgrounds.**

d. A proposal was made in one Bulgarian FGD, that **interdisciplinary team can work on discussing and planning the resolutions of concrete cases should also be included in teacher education.** This kind of hands-on experience helps students to get used to working together with different types of professionals from the university and school environment, to be able to understand each other through acquiring the different terminologies of different disciplines, while performing actual pedagogical work when discussing case studies. A similar workshop-based collaboration was put forward in one Hungarian group as well: **"We would involve the students in intervention or a supervision situation in schools regularly, where besides resolving pedagogical situations they would practice non-violent communication and conflict management."** In Slovakia, another suggestion was made to introduce workshops conducted by relevant experts, such as lawyers, sociologists, experts in ethnic and cultural studies.

Collaboration with Other Parties in Teacher Education

Social responsibility/participation

a. In two Hungarian FGDs, the **issue of the social responsibility of universities was raised** under the heading of collaboration with other institutions and organizations or even individuals. Both groups arrived at a conclusion that **universities should function as knowledge centres without a paternalistic attitude towards other organisations with lesser prestige. University tutors and researchers should be reminded of their roles as intellectuals capable of turning their theoretical knowledge into practice, thereby contributing to the common social good "through the joint exchange of experiences and the co-design of local level anti-segregation plans, taken as an example". Universities could work with both formal and informal community organizations in their respective social environment.**

b. Complaints about universities' exploitation of schools was more typical. "Cooperation is one-sided when the main focus is on the student. After all, they are the ones who come to do questionnaires, research; this practice serves the university."

Pre-service teaching practice

School practice regulations in teacher training are very different in the four consortium countries.

a. While in Albania the regulation is limited, schools can decide on how they work with trainee teachers. "**We do not consider students who come for internships to be part of the staff. We assign these students to the respective teacher and leave the responsibility to that respective teacher.**"

b. Bulgarian FGDs also problematized **the lack of proper regulation of teacher education, and the practice period within**. Harmonizing requirements is necessary to be introduced into school practice, focusing on the differences of pupils' educational needs in different schools. At present, standardisation is more to the forefront.

c. The Hungarian case could be characterized as the polar opposite, where the practice period is regulated in minute details, thus putting pressure on teacher training centres of universities. Universities are restricted in their choices of partner schools where students can fulfil the requirements of their teaching practice, since there has to be a qualified mentor teacher in a school in order to accept trainees. The likelihood that there is a qualified mentor teacher available in any of the segregated and disadvantaged schools is slim. Therefore, this legislation itself adds to the discrimination of segregated schools. Despite this situation, since pressure is on universities to find placement for every student, in schools for the three phases of school practicum (socialisation for the teaching profession, pedagogical participatory practice, subject teaching practice), teacher training centres are reaching out to atypical schools as well now. **In two Hungarian universities, there are attempts to include joint workshops with teachers in the schools where trainees can participate as peers, working together on a series of topics of interest.**

d. In Slovakia, students get information about the problems and methods of teaching in segregated schools mainly from professional literature, and from the tutors of the Department of Pedagogy, who are quite often involved in research on desegregation in eastern Slovakia. This experience is then reflected to a modest extent in the teaching of didactic subjects. **During the school practice period, students do not participate in any specific programme aimed at collaboration with an atypical school.**

Empirical Research and Needs Analysis in Schools

a. In all of the FGDs, the question about relying on empirical qualitative school research for gathering data on issues, phenomena and practices which need interrogation and modification in order to facilitate change and improvement, was considered marginal or irrelevant. Teachers and some of the university tutors are not familiar with research methods which could be performed as part of everyday schoolwork, such as ethnography, case studies or action research. Some university tutors, though familiar with qualitative methods of research, will question the validity and usefulness of such research. They also pointed out that these methods are time consuming. These opinions are in contradiction with what was stated particularly in two previous sections *Identification of Factors Rendering a School Disadvantaged* and *Teachers' Qualities Needed in Segregated Schools.* Therefore, I4S recommendations are to highlight the consideration of promoting the enrichment of academic training provided for teachers with knowledge offered by social sciences, rendering pedagogical knowledge genuinely multidisciplinary. It is essential that this enrichment include such research methods which empower teachers to map their school terrain objectively and from multiple angles. Mapping circumstances is the vantage point for planning the course of development.

b. **The misconception that teachers are inept in mastering the knowledge and competence needed to carry out research is a deep-rooted general opinion, reflecting a hidden prejudice, as well as an internalised belief teachers harbour about their own professional knowledge and performance. Teachers tend to follow the directives of authorities, and they do not question the scientific validity of these directives.**

c. Autonomy as a necessary condition for performing student-centred pedagogical work was a controversial topic in the FGDs. In one Slovak FGD, there was a proposition of classical statistical methods, arguing that **gathering statistical data on the school population, including demographic information, socioeconomic factors, local conditions, and special education needs of students, as well as analysing the results of standardized tests, questionnaires, and internal assessments, contribute to obtaining feedback from students, parents, and teachers, regarding their perceptions of the needs, challenges, and expectations in a segregated school.**

Relevant Key Performance Indicators

Objectives linked to the focus-group discussion events were achieved through intensive communication activities. Each in-person and online event was shared on the project's social media channels. The numbers are calculated by summing the activities of all the posts on the sites. All the pre-defined KPIs for the events have been achieved. Indirect reach is expected to increase as the recommendation are communicated.

	No. of events in the GA	No of events	No. of participants in FGDs	Directly reached citizens in the GA	Directly reached citizens	Indirectly reached citizens in the GA	Indirectly reached citizens
ALBANIA	2	2	10+10=20	20	40	10 000	6 762
BULGARIA	2	2	8+8=16	20	125	10 000	62 0
HUNGARY	4	4	7+16+24+23=70	40	253	20 000	12 883
SLOVAKIA	4	2	10+8=18	20	18	10 000	0[4]
TOTAL	**12**	**10**	**124**	**100**	**436**	**50 000**	**20 203**

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[4] No data was supplied.

Appendix: Recommendations to Teacher Training Institutions

I4S recommendations on the partnership between schools and teacher training institutions to tackle social inequalities

Inclusion4Schools is a four-year Horizon Europe Coordination and Support Action (CSA) initiative. The project seeks to cultivate inclusive education and to foster a culture of dialogue addressing unjust educational structures. I4S is dedicated to countering practices of exclusion in education, and to challenging the systemic reproduction of inequalities, emphasizing a bottom-up approach in the context of segregated schools and communities. Collaboration among education system stakeholders, including academics, policymakers, teachers, and various professionals facilitates the sharing of theoretical knowledge, informed policies, and locally successful techniques to enhance the pupils' educational progress. Within the I4S project, events for sharing perspectives and discussing issues arising from diverse experiences serve as tools for progress, encouraging experimentation and innovation expected to drive positive change.

One of the project goals is to gather data on how teacher training institutions and their partner schools in each participating country address issues of inequalities in education. This involves identifying similarities and differences in teacher training, and collaboration with partner schools to gain a nuanced understanding of segregation and school inequality. By illuminating these experiences, the project aims to deepen theoretical understanding, to localize knowledge in order to tackle segregation effectively, and to call for change in teacher training and school-university partnerships. The rationale for fostering inclusive education is rooted in the belief that schools must accommodate a heterogeneous society, practicing pedagogies that embrace all children, regardless of their socio-economic conditions. Inclusive education promotes formal and informal learning opportunities while ensuring that social justice remains a core principle.

Our focus group discussions organized in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia served as a structured dialogue between academics and teachers, exploring ways how their cooperation can introduce practices leading to quality education for students with diverse needs. School-university partnerships are intricate and multifaceted, demanding a closer examination of roles and relationships between the two institutions. Emphasizing mutual exchange of resources and ideas, the project recommends avoiding top-down arrangements in favour of more equitable and intensive interactions. The focus group discussions' outcomes provide the basis for recommendations to be considered and negotiated by universities and institutions providing teacher training.

I4S Recommendations to Teacher Training Institutions

1. Emphasize Multidisciplinary Knowledge

2. Foster Acquiring Teacher Competencies via Hands on Experience

3. Incorporate Leadership and Organizational Management

4. Promote Collaboration in Research

5. Enrich and Diversify Teaching Practice

1. Emphasize Multidisciplinary Knowledge

Multidisciplinary features of education science and pedagogy should be accentuated. This will create a **knowledge base for teachers, one** that can be converted into pedagogical activities **which answer most to the needs of pupils in schools located in a spectrum of social and cultural environments**, including schools in unprivileged surroundings and even in segregated settings. It is crucial to incorporate disciplines that provide prospective teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to diagnose the origins of students' challenges, whether coming from individual ability gaps, psychological factors, or unfavourable social circumstances. Sociology, cultural anthropology, ethnic studies, minority studies, gender studies, communication theories, philosophy (ethics, axiology), political science, organisation management, legal studies, human rights studies, etc.

Schoolteachers in all FGDs urged for novice teachers to be equipped for functioning in situations where general pedagogical and subject methodology knowledge and competencies are in themselves insufficient. A wider – multidisciplinary – scope of competencies ensures that teachers will act competently instead of denying the existence of problematic situations, and exhibiting helplessness by voicing that to find ways of resolving the situations beyond the scope of "normal" is not their responsibility.

2. Foster Acquiring Teacher Competencies via Hands on Experience

When focusing on teachers' professional capacities, teacher education should develop strategies for the **clear and precise understanding and acquisition of teachers' competencies, as distinct from competence and attitude**. The analyses of case studies, observations in schools, etc. are proposed to provide trainee teachers the opportunity to experience professional competencies in action while facing a wide variety of challenges. **A partnership group – e.g. case study group - together with schoolteachers should be set up with the purpose of developing the methodology** for this task. **Documenting teachers' hands-on experience should be performed regularly, so that a resource library for university students could be developed.**

Based on the content of the Hungarian and Bulgarian FGDs, both the participating teachers – especially mentor teachers - and university tutors introduced examples of such partnership groups already in practice. They described their experience in these groups as empowering, both in contributing to their knowledge effectively and in creating a site for professional communication with the relevant stakeholders.

3. Incorporate Leadership and Organizational Management

Universities providing teacher education should initiate study groups including university tutors, university students, schoolteachers and directors/principals of schools to **embark on including a new knowledge and skills area, to master leadership and organisational management**. The organisation of a school can best be understood as a set of overlapping systems: the student system, the faculty system, the parent system, the administration system. An exemplary school climate can be seen as **facilitating communication** among these systems. This description leads to **a detailed understanding of the scope of activities and responsibilities of persons belonging to these sub-systems**. **Universities should take part in both planning and evaluation activities of schools as organisations.**

Understanding schools as organizations was brought up in the FGDs when discussing school autonomy in decision making. In the four participating countries, levels of school autonomy are different, scaling from almost totally centralized education systems, where it is difficult to practice autonomy (Bulgaria, Hungary), to a system in which autonomy is present, but considered a detractor to transparency, rather than an opportunity for initiating (local and policy) development (Albania). The Slovak case represents a hybrid system. The basis for any innovation and development in schools is an evaluation of the current "state of affairs", and then producing a plan for development. These activities require both theoretical and methodological knowledge. Hence the recommendation to include the subject in the teacher education curriculum. (A school self-evaluation seminar is realized in WP4 Task 1.1. of the I4S project.)

4. Promote Collaboration in Research

Universities providing teacher education should **invite teachers to collaborate in research projects, especially in those targeting scientific enquiry into understanding how schools operate, how teachers define their profession, what values shape school cultures, etc.** Research should also be linked with action in schools. **This requires social research methods to be introduced as part of teacher education.** In order to precisely identify research topics and later be able to develop plans for inquiry, **the terminology used in both theory and practice should be consistent.** This in itself calls for large scale research, using a variety of methods. However, results will strengthen the reliability of both research and professional communication on education. **Consistent terminology can also assist in singling out those areas in which the lack of research is persistent.**

In all four participating countries, the contents and requirements of the internship period of trainee teachers were deemed problematic in FGDs. Apart from teaching practice in the students' subject area, the same issue was raised by schoolteachers and students (in Hungary), namely that the rest of the practice period requires mostly familiarization with school administrative tasks. Suggestions were made that trainee students should be more involved in investigating pedagogical issues, and assigned tasks in which they work with the pupils and with other teachers (than their mentor teacher). It was pointed out that in order to put trainee students' academic knowledge to word, they should be given free hand in planning and executing small scale research projects, the results of which the school can utilize in their own evaluation and planning processes. This would benefit both trainee students and schools.

5. Enrich and Diversify Teaching Practice

Students' teaching practice should be understood as a sub-system in education which includes **participants with distinct roles from different institutions.** For a successful outcome of the activities within the sub-system, **regular and regulated interaction - cooperation and communication - is necessary. For trainee student teachers to acquire and practise the required professional competencies, and to familiarise themselves with all the activities of a well-functioning school in any social environment, guidance from both academic tutors and school teachers is essential. This requires a detailed shared strategy**. It is not only trainee students who have tasks and responsibilities, but all parties involved must perform in their relevant roles. **For the smooth operation of this period of teacher education, it is necessary to produce detailed action plans, the preparation of which is a joint responsibility of all the parties as actors.**

Action plan contents should be varied – reflecting the real and present diversity of any education system - so that trainee teachers could try themselves in challenging situations. In three of the FGDs (Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania) trainee teachers' isolation in the schools was brought up as a problematic issue by university tutors. They expressed criticism towards the practice of trainee students working and communicating almost exclusively with their assigned mentor teachers. Schools do

not see the presence and work of a student there as an opportunity to exploit his/her knowledge, e.g. by assigning them extracurricular activities or twinning them with pupils needing mentoring. Student teachers should also be invited to staff meetings.

The implementation of these recommendations can lead to more effective teacher training, to better teacher preparation, and ultimately to improvement of educational outcomes for students.