

# Inclusion4Schools

## D3.6 Recommendations To Local Authorities



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## Project Partners

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1 (Coordinator)	Regional Centre for Information and Scientific Development (RCISD)	Hungary
2	John Wesley Theological College	Hungary
3	C.E.G.A. – Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives Foundation (CEGA)	Bulgaria
4	J. Selye University	Slovakia
5	Oltalom Charity Society	Hungary
6	Albanian National Orphans Association (ANOA)	Albania

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# 1 Introduction

This document is built upon the achieved results, good practices and lessons learnt during the implementation of the Inclusion4Schools project, with a specific focus on the activities for practical piloting of community-centered approaches under WP3 (Tasks 3.1 and 3.2), and on the research for mapping and impact analysis among the main stakeholders under WP1 (Task 1.2) of the Inclusion4Schools project (I4S).

The remarkable achievements of the community building models, tested in diverse local contexts in 22 pilot localities/schools in the four partner countries – Hungary, Albania, Bulgaria and Slovakia, justify our ambition to recommend rolling out the models in other localities and disadvantaged schools, aimed to tackle the educational inequalities in vulnerable isolated ethnic minorities and to promote the inclusive education of children. Hence, this Deliverable 3.6: Recommendations to Local Authorities outlines the societal benefits from building a community around the school and the potential of local authorities to lead such processes by adapting the working models and good practices to the local contexts. In partnership with other stakeholders, local authorities are able to act as facilitators and providers of resources for the initiatives of the residents, so that they could exercise control over their lives, i.e. they are capable to plan and organize actions to achieve locally relevant desired goals.

The recommendations to local authorities are based on the findings and conclusions of **two in-depth analytical assessments of the outcomes and impact of the project interventions**, which are performed in parallel by the project partners, applying different methodology and focus, and summarized in **two comprehensive analytical reports**:

## D1.4 Report on the Results of the Social Impact Analysis.

Developed by Oltalom, Hungary

The report specifically explores the attitudes of the local project participants and offers a nuanced understanding of both quantitative shifts in perceptions and qualitative reflections on their experiences. The impact assessment was performed through sociology methods to measure the changes in the attitudes and perceptions of local stakeholders, resulting from their participation in the piloted community building initiatives. Attitude tests were held with key stakeholders (teachers, educators, school principals, civil workers, municipality personnel, and mayors), and with local residents (mostly parents). A pre-posttest design was employed and aimed to assess stakeholders' and locals' attitudes both prior (baseline) and following (after the community building activities). The feedback of moderators and participants in the events was also analyzed, in order to assess the event's success in achieving goals, such as sharing best practices, strengthening community-school ties, and enhancing teacher training. Focus groups, performed at the end of the





project interventions, provided qualitative information to evaluate the impact of the I4S program through structured, open-ended conversations.

**D3.5 Report on the Analysis of the Impact of Community Building Actions.**

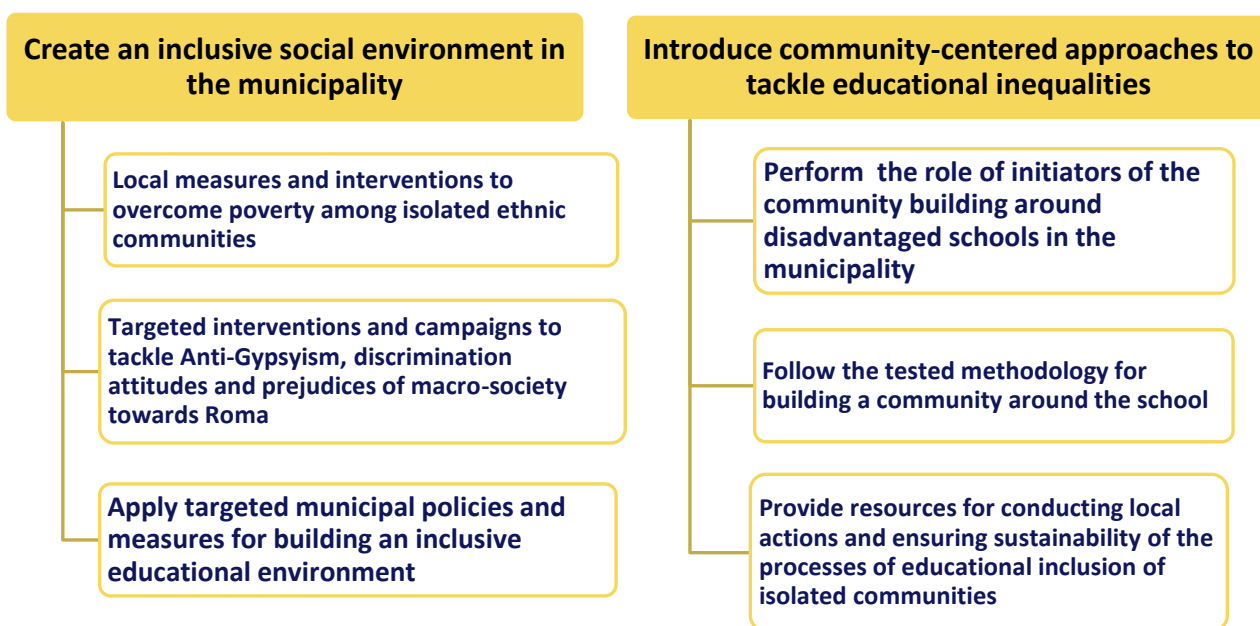
**Developed by C.E.G.A. Foundation, Bulgaria.**

This report is focused on analyzing the achievements of community building interventions in comparison to the original project targets and ambitions. Accordingly, the analysis applied the methods and the five standard criteria for evaluation of projects and programs, given also in the EC guidelines to evaluation procedures: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

Intended to inform local stakeholders about the practical steps and the benefits from scaling up the community centered approaches, the report is also exploring the dynamics of the community building process in diverse national/local contexts, the challenges and solutions found, the methods and good practices for building school-community partnerships, the approaches to motivation of different stakeholders to participate in the process, considering their different roles and potential contribution to the mission of the partnership between schools and communities.

Both reports are complementing each other in providing a comprehensive picture of the long-term impact of the community building interventions, influencing the people and communities, involved in the I4S project.

**Scheme of general recommendations to local authorities, outlined by the I4S project**



## 2 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 semi-peripheral, 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 program 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:

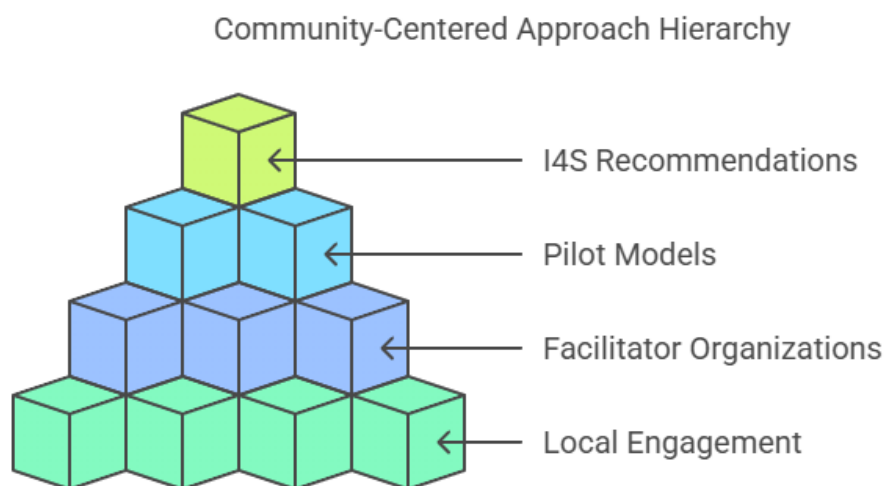
- (1) to support and coordinate community schools (as being central to the constitution and maintenance of cohesive local communities) and their respective communities of practice, and
- (2) to create a place and culture of sharing (knowledge, praxis, solidarity) between such communities by initiating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



### 3 Context: The Needs and Benefits of Community-centred Approaches

The I4S recommendations for scaling up the community centered approaches were justified by the experience, gained by the project partners in piloting the community building models, by the achieved results, effects and benefits for the local participants involved – teachers, parents, communities, local stakeholders. The community building processes in Albania were facilitated by ANOA, in Bulgaria by C.E.G.A. Foundation, in Hungary by John Wesley Theological College and in Slovakia by J. Selye University. Here, we summarize in brief only the key findings and conclusions about the process, which were explored in detail in the above-mentioned reports.



#### 3.1 Problems and Needs Addressed

The problems and gaps in the education of Roma and other disadvantaged ethnic communities are explored and analyzed in surveys and research (incl. those under WP1 of the I4S project). Public authorities, professional societies of teachers and educators are quite familiar with the gaps; while the media is disseminating information to the public at large, often marked by disinformation, prejudices and negative stereotypes.

Research has proved that **the segregation is one of the crucial factors generating educational inequalities in the socially isolated ethnic communities and marginalized groups**. The educational segregation has not yet been overcome in the four project countries, despite the desegregation



measures, performed in the last decades. Despite the country specifics and the historical roots of educational segregation in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia, there are identified **common problems and needs for support of the interaction and partnerships between disadvantaged schools and excluded ethnic communities (Roma and other vulnerable minorities):**

- **Mutual distrust between educational institutions and Roma communities**, stemming from a history of discrimination and exclusion and often leading to low parental involvement in their children's education, as well as reluctance among parents to engage with schools. Many of the teachers are from the majority population, have limited awareness of Roma ethno-cultural codes and are easily influenced by the negative stereotypes towards Roma, which are spreading in the macro-society.
- **Communication and language barriers between schools and Roma families**, often hindered by language differences and a lack of culturally competent staff within schools, who can engage with these communities in a meaningful way.
- **Cultural differences** – schools may not be equipped to understand and accommodate the cultural practices and needs of Roma families, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts.
- **Parental involvement** – Roma parents may face challenges in supporting their children's learning and engaging with schools, partly due to systemic barriers and historical inequities in access to education. Furthermore, schools may not actively seek to involve Roma parents in decision-making processes or school activities, leading to further alienation.
- **Inadequate support structures and insufficient programs**, aimed at bridging the gap between schools and marginalized communities. Without adequate support, schools struggle to create an inclusive environment that meets the needs of all students.
- **Partnerships between schools and Roma communities are typically limited and project-based rather than strategic and long-term**. There are instances of cooperation with local governments, minority governments, and various associations, but these collaborations often lack sustainability. This sporadic and project-focused approach limits the effectiveness of efforts to support Roma inclusion in education.

Strong justifications for local awareness of the problematic relationships between schools and communities were provided by the SWOT analysis, elaborated by the participants during the first workshops of the action planning process. In response to these and other challenges, the Inclusion4Schools has launched and piloted community-centered practices for building mutual trust and convincing both communities and schools that their ultimate goals are common – better education for children and improved welfare of the communities.





## 3.2 Concept and methodology of the community building

A Guide for community building was designed by an international team of project experts, providing coherent concept, methods and guidance on the technology, approaches and tools. The piloting in the four partner countries confirmed the relevance and effectiveness of the methodology.

**The long-term goal of the community building** is to tackle the educational inequalities by building a community around the school, which will attract all interested parties and in particular the most isolated ethnic communities, mobilizing them in common actions for the improvement of education.

**The specific objectives** are identified in response to local contexts and identified problems in different pilot schools and are related to:

- Overcoming the still existing distances and mutual distrust between the disadvantaged schools and isolated ethnic communities;
- Breaking the barriers in communication between teachers, school managers, educators and parents from isolated ethnic communities, informal community leadership, local community self-organizations, reducing prejudices towards each other;
- Introducing operational practices and informal communication channels for bias-free dialogue and mutual exchange between teachers and parents;
- Mobilizing schools and communities for common actions and initiatives supporting the improvement of the education of disadvantaged children – reducing dropouts, motivating children for higher educational achievements;
- Expanding partnerships by attracting the relevant stakeholders that can support the process with knowledge, resources, administrative solutions, etc.

The community building within the I4S project applied **three main participatory methods for mobilization of the local potential and enhanced interaction**:

**(1) Participatory community planning**, designed in three stages/workshops for: (a) Participatory assessment of the current situation in the school and the education in the locality, the problems and needs, including SWOT analysis of the situation and interaction between the school and community; (b) Workshop, outlining the desired future and the vision for the development of the communities in the locality, reflecting the diverse interests of the residents; reaching consensus about the common long-term goals and objectives of the school – community partnership; (c) Priority setting and action planning of activities in support to the school, advocacy campaigns, etc., responding to opportunities and available resources in the locality.

**(2) School – community actions/common social actions** are outlined during the participatory planning with a short-term and a long-term perspective. Activities like fests, big meetings, debates, advocacy campaigns or other actions are identified by the local



participants and performed as the first visible and tangible result of the participatory community planning process, performed during the three workshops. The shared feeling of satisfaction from a successful action has proved to be the best motivating factor to continue working together. It is of crucial importance for ensuring the sustainability of the community building and strengthening the support for the implementation of the overall action plan in the future.

**(3) Community learning methods** are applied to invest knowledge in the communities and to help bringing the diverse sub-communities together. Interactive workshops and open school classes are held on educational and other issues, identified by the participants. Learning events and discussions on the topics of social exclusion/ inclusion, intercultural and interethnic tolerance and protection against discrimination are considered helpful for overcoming prejudices, negative stereotypes and mutual distrust of the participants.

**The piloting and demonstrating models of transformative practices of schools** for fostering the inclusive education involved pilot schools and localities in building school-community collaboration, bringing together teachers, parents, various local stakeholders and institutions - people from diverse, often divided and confronting communities. The local community planning and actions were specifically focused on proposing solutions and improvements in education, in particular targeting the disadvantaged Roma children and families. The main areas of common interests were the welfare of children and young people, inclusive education for better opportunities for personal development of all children and young people, the improvement of the quality of life in the settlement and local communities.

### 3.3 Key achievements of the piloting in the four partner countries

**The community-centered approaches** were tested under I4S project in a total of 30 pilot schools/localities: 6 in Albania, 7 in Bulgaria, 8 in Hungary and 9 in Slovakia, demonstrating how the model worked in a variety of diverse specific conditions and the social environment of different primary and secondary schools, challenged by educational inequalities and facing strong barriers in the interaction with parents and communities.

**Community building interventions were carried out in 22 schools/localities.** All three components of the process – participatory community planning, social action and community learning through open school classes were carried out in 8 pilot schools. Community planning and wide-scale events without open school classes were performed in 9 pilots. The process covered only community planning workshops in 3 pilots and only big school-community events were held as a follow up of the open school classes in 2 localities. In addition, **another 8 different localities were involved only in community learning activities – open school classes** (3 in Albania, 1 in Hungary and 4 in Slovakia).



The quantitative results of the community building actions show that the I4S project has achieved more than the initially set target indicators in terms of number of pilot localities/schools, events and people involved.

Key Quantitative Indicators for direct results reached during the piloting	Total planned	Data - results achieved				Total achieved
		Albania	Bulgaria	Hungary	Slovakia	
<b>Community planning interventions: meetings and workshops for SWOT analysis, vision identification and action planning</b>						
Number of pilot schools / localities involved in community building	19	3	7	7	5	<b>22</b>
Number of meetings and workshops	57	7	17	18	15	<b>57</b>
Number of local participants attending workshops and meetings	1425	238	463	254	376	<b>1331</b>
Total number of participants attending the workshops		278	527	387	468	<b>1660</b>
<b>Community action interventions: large-scale school – community events</b>						
Number of large-scale events and family days	19	1	9	8	5	<b>23</b>
Total number of participants attending large-scale events	1520	200	1225	970	971	<b>3366</b>
<b>Target groups reached - Summary of individual people involved in the community building process</b>						
Approximate number of individuals involved in the community building process	1520	371	1025	918	899	<b>3213</b>
<b>Community learning activities – open school classes</b>						
Number of pilots involved both in community building and community learning	25	2	4	4	-	<b>16</b>
Number of pilots involved only in open school classes		3	-	1	4	
Number of open school classes held in pilots involved both in community building and community learning	75	6	14	12	-	<b>62</b>
Number of open school classes held in pilots involved only in community learning		9	-	5	16	
<b>Total number of participants in open school classes</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>2023</b>

A total of 80 events – various workshops, community meetings and large-scale school-community events were conducted, involving a total of 5026 participants. Approximately 3213 individuals were



involved in the community building process, considering that some of the participants have attended more than one event. Furthermore, 62 open school classes were carried out in the four countries, involving a total of 2023 people in community learning.

#### KEY CONCLUSIONS of

**D3.5 Report on the Analysis of the Impact of Community Building Actions, developed by C.E.G.A. Foundation, Bulgaria.**

The analysis of effectiveness and impact of the community building outlined the achieved qualitative changes in the interaction between the schools and communities, enhancing the inclusiveness of education and future development opportunities for children with a particular focus on disadvantaged minority communities – Roma and other.

**Effects and benefits from the community building around schools**

**The community building interventions in the four partner countries brought about tangible effects and benefits for the local participants in the process (teachers, parents, community members, other stakeholders) and were indicative of a promising long-term impact – changes in**

**attitudes and practices at the local level.**

The most important are:

- **Strengthened school-community relationships:** The initiatives fostered stronger relationships between schools and their surrounding communities. By involving a diverse array of stakeholders in the discussions and activities, the process helped build trust and collaboration, which are essential for sustaining long-term partnerships. This strengthened relationship is expected to contribute positively to the educational outcomes of students.
- **Initiated open dialogue and interaction between diverse key stakeholders in education.** The diverse groups of participants have gained positive experience in acting together, overcoming the visible or hidden communication barriers, dependencies, fears and mutual distrust – teachers and parents, non-Roma and Roma. Diverse communities and stakeholders, teachers and parents in pilot localities are getting to know each other at personal and community levels.
- **Created common products – SWOT analysis and action plans** – are tangible benefits for all participants in the process.
- An important outcome for the local participants is the **increased knowledge, awareness and skills** as a result of their involvement in various workshops and open school classes. The learning benefits have equipped participants with the tools and confidence to take an active role in creating positive change within their schools and communities by the developed collaborative skills, enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving.



**Impact on the participants – people, schools, communities**

**Substantial changes have commenced in attitudes and practices at the local level, as a result of the introduced participatory approaches in the interaction between schools, parents, community members and local**

**institutions.** The impact assessment of the community building interventions has registered in particular:

- **Motivated schools and local stakeholders**, enabled to continue the efforts to increase their interactions with the communities, to bring new allies and supporters and to reduce the school drop-outs and overall improve the educational practices and children's achievements.
- **Signs of a breakthrough in building trust between the school and isolated ethnic communities** have been registered in most pilot localities. The community building actions succeeded in building stronger ties between the school and the broader community.
- **Commitment to the mission of building a community around the school**, promoting the inclusiveness of education, in particular, tackling educational inequalities and segregation of marginalized ethnic minorities – Roma and others. A positive shift has been registered towards deeper understanding of the benefits from the community support for better education of children and welfare of the community. The perception of existing common interests of the key participants in the community building process is the corner stone and the engine for transforming a group of people into a community. Committed promoters of community centered approaches have appeared among school staff, parents, civil activists, etc., in most of the pilot localities. Despite the differences between localities – in some, the number of promoters is bigger, in others, there are only a few – they have the potential to attract a critical mass of supporters able to drive forward the process of building a community around the school.
- **Empowerment of socially isolated ethnic communities** (Roma, Egyptian, millet and others) - the community building process provided them with rare opportunities to engage directly with schools, local authorities and other stakeholders. The increased self-reliance of the community members and the change of attitudes may open new horizons and spur ambitions for the development of the community.
- **Increased awareness and sensitivity to inclusivity of education**. The community building process has highlighted the challenges faced by marginalized students, particularly those from the Roma community and has led to a deeper understanding of the need for inclusive practices within the school. This shift in mindset is a crucial step towards creating a more equitable and supportive environment for all members of the community.





- **Promising opportunities to increase the parental involvement in their children's education** are expected to enhance students' outcomes at school. The community building has strengthened the relationship between the school and the parents. As a result, school staff has gained valuable insights into parents' perspectives, which will help tailor communication and engagement strategies in the future. The participation in direct dialogue with the teachers helped the parents to feel welcomed in the school environment and to start overcoming fears and distrust in the communication with the teachers.
- **Community leadership of the process:** The ambition to enforce the community leadership of the process was accomplished to some extent during the piloting. Stronger indications in some schools for feelings of ownership on the community building process have been detected – mostly in the feedback from managers and teachers, and less so in the feedback from parents and other members of vulnerable communities. It is well-known from practical experience, that strengthening the community leadership of the process requires more time and human efforts on behalf of the external facilitators on the spot, efforts, invested in motivation, transfer of knowledge/skills, self-esteem of the local actors.

#### KEY CONCLUSIONS of

#### D1.4 Report on the Results of the Social Impact Analysis, developed by Oltalom, Hungary

The Social Impact Analysis has registered **positive shifts in attitudes and perceptions of participants in piloting the community building approaches** in the partner countries:

In **Hungary**, the program successfully fostered an atmosphere of respect, inclusivity, and understanding, which participants widely appreciated. Focus group

discussions highlighted the program's role in building trust and encouraging open dialogue, which strengthened relationships between teachers, parents, and other community stakeholders. Participants valued the opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions and problem-solving, contributing to a more collaborative mindset. Positive outcomes included initiatives, such as family days and health-focused school programs, illustrating the program's capacity to inspire localized action. However, measurable changes in key indicators such as empathy, perceptions of social injustice, and views on Roma people were limited. Additionally, community-focused initiatives showed mixed outcomes, with declining collaboration and engagement among some participants following the program's conclusion. This highlights the need for more robust mechanisms to sustain participation and build on the program's initial successes.

In **Albania**, the program achieved notable successes. Solidarity, perceptions of social injustice, and professional efficacy improved significantly, demonstrating the program's impact on fostering awareness and collaboration. However, marginal increases in paternalistic attitudes signaled the need for interventions to critically address hierarchical perceptions in education. Participants



praised the program's inclusivity and collaborative nature, which encouraged dialogue and strengthened relationships between schools, residents, and local institutions. Tangible community-driven outcomes included efforts to reduce school drop-out rates, train teachers and parents, and raise awareness of inclusive education. The program also motivated participants to consider their professional roles in addressing social challenges, with many expressing newfound confidence in their ability to effect change. While overwhelmingly positive, the feedback emphasized the importance of continued community engagement and support to ensure sustained progress.

**Bulgaria** demonstrated the most substantial improvements across all assessed dimensions. Empathy, perceptions of efficacy, and awareness of social injustices showed significant gains, reflecting the program's strong influence. Participants' views on Roma people became more balanced, with a marked reduction in competence-based biases and greater acknowledgment of their capabilities. The program successfully encouraged welcoming attitudes toward external support and a willingness to allocate resources toward dependent and independent initiatives. Community-focused efforts included campaigns to address child marriages and increase Roma girls' access to education. Participants widely praised the program's ability to foster professional and cultural growth, with many noting its role in strengthening dialogue between educators, parents, and municipal representatives. The program's training sessions and community events were particularly valued for their practicality and ability to inspire meaningful local initiatives.

In **Slovakia**, the program's outcomes were less favorable. Decline in perceptions of social injustice and bias awareness were accompanied by significant increases in paternalistic attitudes and internal attributions for Roma disadvantages. Community engagement was limited, with participants relying less on residential and professional networks after the program. This decline suggested challenges in translating the program's objectives into sustained action. While the program provided opportunities for dialogue and reflection, its overall reception was mixed, with fewer examples of community-driven initiatives. Participants highlighted the need for greater support to foster lasting connections and promote active involvement in local challenges.

**Overall**, the I4S program demonstrated a mixed impact across the four countries. Albania and Bulgaria emerged as the most successful cases, with significant improvements in inclusivity, collaboration, and actionable community outcomes. Hungary and Slovakia showed more limited progress, with concerns about declining engagement. Across all countries, participants valued the program's focus on fostering respect, understanding, and inclusivity, though there were calls for greater emphasis on teamwork, sustained follow-ups, and strategies to encourage long-term attitude shifts.

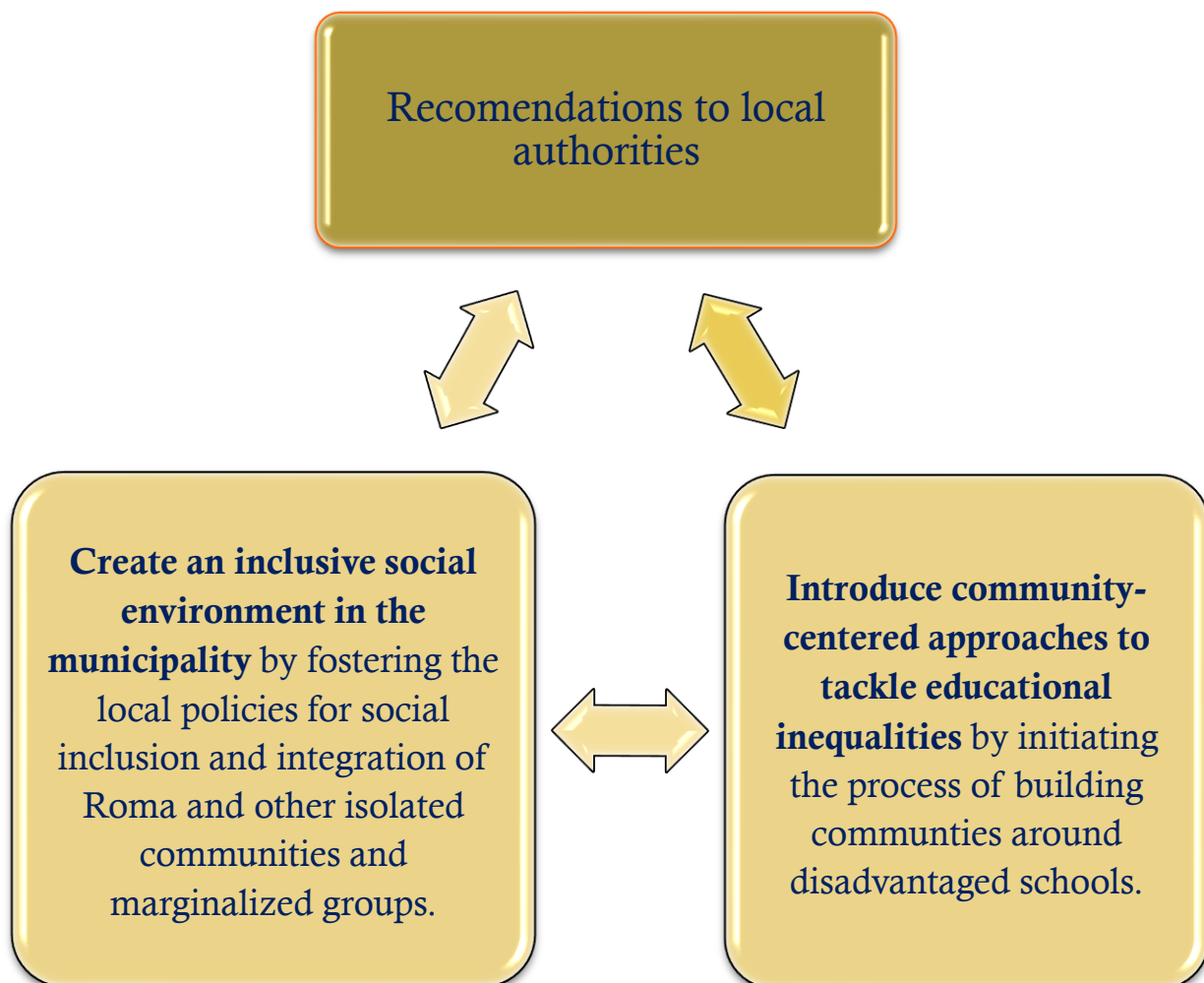
**The achievements during the I4S project lifetime have created promising conditions for ensuring the sustainability of the community building process in most of the pilot localities.** Furthermore,



while the community-building process has been successful in the short-term, concerns about sustainability are evident in some of the pilot localities. The continued engagement of stakeholders, especially in economically disadvantaged areas, remains uncertain without further support and resources. This points to the need for strategies that ensure the longevity of the initiatives started during the process.

## 4 Recommendations to Local Authorities

The I4S recommendations to local authorities are based on the research results, achievements, good practices and lessons learnt during the piloting of the community-centered approaches.



Considering the complexity of the problems and factors that are steadily re-generating various patterns of educational segregation, on the one hand, and the crucial role of the municipal authorities in enhancing the local development and welfare, on the other, **the recommendations to local authorities are grouped in two main directions:**

- **Firstly, recommendations for fostering the local policies for social inclusion and integration of Roma, other disadvantaged ethnic communities and marginalized groups**, focused to tackle the structural barriers of exclusion, poverty, discrimination, etc., and to close the gaps between Roma and general population, in which the educational inequalities are deeply rooted.
- **Secondly, recommendations for improving the municipal support to schools and education at the local level** by taking the role of an initiator and facilitator of community building interventions, aimed to contribute to inclusive education and better access of disadvantaged children to quality education.

**The integration and inclusion of Roma is officially adopted policy of the National governments in EU and enlargement countries**, in line with the mainstream EU policies and values and with the targeted EC strategic documents, aimed at tackling the socioeconomic exclusion of Roma, such as the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, issued in 2011 (COM(2011)173), and the updated EC strategic recommendations, issued in 2020, namely: A Union of Equality: EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation (COM(2020) 620 final), and a number of other policy documents and guidelines.

**EC guidance for national action up to 2030** (COM (2020) 620 final) is considering the need of differentiated measures, responding to the diversity of national/local contexts, but at the same time is proposing to follow common approaches and targets, in particular:

- ✓ *Strengthen focus on equality to complement the inclusion approach*: Addressing the four policy areas (education, employment, healthcare and housing) through an integrated approach remains key for Roma inclusion, but there is also a need for a clear focus on equality. In particular, the fight against discrimination and Anti-Gypsyism should be a key objective and cross-cutting priority in each policy area, complementing the inclusion approach.
- ✓ *Promote participation through empowerment, cooperation and trust*: Meaningful Roma participation must be ensured in all stages of policy-making. Roma political, economic and cultural engagement should be promoted with a sense of belonging as full members of society. Empowerment and capacity-building of Roma, civil society and public authorities must be ensured, building cooperation and trust between stakeholders and between Roma and non-Roma communities.



- ✓ *Reflect diversity among Roma:* Member States should ensure that their strategic frameworks cover all Roma on their territory and reflect the needs of diverse groups through an intersectional approach. They should bear in mind how different aspects of identity can combine to exacerbate discrimination.
- ✓ *Combine mainstreaming and explicit, but not exclusive Roma targeting,* ensuring that mainstream services are inclusive and providing additional targeted support to promote effective equal access for Roma to rights and services.
- ✓ *Improve target-setting, data collection, monitoring and reporting.*

The **philosophy and the methodology of the community building interventions, piloted within the I4S project**, closely correspond to the common approaches, proposed by the EC.

**The long-term aim** remains to ensure effective equality and to close the gap between Roma and the general population. Achieving equity and inclusion calls for increased use and better channeling of resources and the involvement and partnership of Roma communities, at all government levels – central and local authorities, sectors and stakeholders (national governments, EU institutions, international organizations, civil society and, as well as industry and academia).

## 4.1 Recommendations for creating inclusive social environment in the municipality

Along with the national governments, **strong commitment and engagement is required by the municipal authorities** in performing the policy measures for effective equality, socio-economic inclusion and meaningful participation of Roma on the spot at the local level. The local authorities are assigned with the task to provide substantial contribution to achieving the common EU objectives in Roma educational integration (COM(2020) 620 final) to: “Increase effective equal access to quality inclusive mainstream education” by: “Cutting the gap in participation in early childhood education and care by at least half; Reducing the gap in upper secondary completion by at least one third”; and “Working towards eliminating segregation by cutting at least in half the proportion of Roma children attending segregated primary schools”.

The conclusions of research and local interventions, performed within I4S project, have proved again, that the progress in overcoming educational inequalities closely depends on the overall social inclusion policies in all sectors of social and economic development. As outlined below, the municipal authorities should contribute to the creation of inclusive social and educational environment for vulnerable children, families and communities by targeted local policies.





## Local policy level: recommendations for creation of inclusive social environment

**Local measures and interventions to overcome poverty among isolated ethnic communities**

- Economic support programs;
- Priority inclusion of parents and students in programs for improving professional qualifications;
- Support to parents in finding a job, adequate to their skills;
- Support from local authorities to improve the housing conditions of vulnerable families with students.

**Targeted interventions and campaigns to tackle Anti-Gypsyism, discrimination attitudes and prejudices of macro-society towards Roma**

- Anti-discrimination campaigns to improve relationships between Roma and the majority population;
- Building trust among discriminated communities towards the majority and institutions.

**Municipal policies and measures for building an inclusive educational environment in the schools on their territory**

- Advocating for changes in the school network on the territory of municipalities to overcome the segregation of individual schools;
- Monitoring of educational segregation and follow-up advice /interventions to eradicate segregation practices inside the schools;
- Support for improvement of school infrastructure for schools attended by disadvantaged students.

Effective local policies and measures tackling the gaps between the Roma and majority will help to increase the opportunities and social resources of disadvantaged families, needed to ensure the regular school attendance of their children. Poverty in families from isolated communities usually leads to poor educational outcomes. Lack of money for school supplies and suitable school clothes and shoes are common arguments often raised by parents for early drop-out from the educational system. Local authorities have the opportunity to positively influence the level of poverty of students' parents by implementing targeted policies in this regard:

**(1) Local measures and interventions to overcome poverty among isolated ethnic communities with a focus on disadvantaged parents of students, so that they can equally include their children in the learning process.** The support in all of these aspects should be linked to regular school attendance and improved academic performance by children. In particular:

- **Economic support programs.**

Develop and implement programs that provide economic support to families in need, ensuring that all students have the necessary resources to succeed in school. This could include providing school supplies, uniforms, and financial assistance for extracurricular activities.

- **Priority inclusion of parents and students in programs for improving professional qualifications.**

Such programs exist at local and national levels and in most cases are managed either by the administrations themselves, or by locally based national institutions. In both cases, local authorities, together with the school management, can identify those who are most in need and at the same time, are ready to join such programs. Through them, these people will get a chance for development, will start a more prestigious job and will be able to change the lives of their families. They can become an example for their children how learning can improve their lives.

- **Support to parents in finding a job, adequate to their skills.**

Local authorities usually have limited opportunities to offer jobs, but to some extent, municipal administrations can influence employers to hire people from isolated communities. They can intervene through specific conditions offered to entrepreneurs, applying for municipal support/resources/land for opening new businesses, and/or through targeted projects, providing benefits to employers and requirements for hiring unemployed vulnerable Roma parents and people. Very often the Roma and other isolated ethnic communities are subject to employment discrimination and face difficulties in finding jobs. And unemployment leads to poverty strongly affecting the children's education. Local authorities need to monitor these discriminatory processes and intervene adequately in identifying such cases.



- **Support from local authorities to improve the housing conditions of vulnerable families with students.**

One of the reasons for the low level of education among isolated communities are poor living conditions. Children from such families do not have the basic conditions for homework – their own corner in which to write their homework. Local authorities should provide part of the housing stock of municipalities to vulnerable families with students. This way, these families will get out of the isolated environment and their children will have a better opportunity to prepare for school and achieve better results. Experience shows that these families should initially receive socio-psychological support in order to adapt to the new environment. Where the provision of housing is impossible, support can be provided to improve the condition of housing in the isolated area.

**(2) Targeted interventions and campaigns to tackle Anti-Gypsyism, discrimination attitudes and prejudices of macro-society towards Roma and to support the creation of an inclusive social environment in the municipality.**

- **Anti-discrimination campaigns, aimed to improve relationships between Roma and majority population.**

Experts confirm that one of the biggest problems, facing the creation of a school community, is the non-acceptance by the macro-society of children from Roma and other vulnerable/isolated ethnic communities. This, among other factors, further isolates these communities and makes children and parents unwelcome in the school environment. The lack of desire for inclusion is largely due to the discriminatory attitudes of the majority, part of which are the teachers. Therefore, it is very important for local authorities, together with other institutions, to develop and implement long-term campaigns to change the attitudes of the majority towards isolated ethnic and religious communities. It is important to include schools in the campaign - teachers, students, administration and support staff from the respective municipality. This way, in parallel, the local residents can move towards building a school community, in which all relevant stakeholders participate.

- **Building trust among discriminated communities towards the majority and institutions by including people from the community in activities organized by municipalities, together with schools and other cultural institutions.**

The calendar of cultural events of the municipalities should include activities that show the cultural diversity in the respective region. Representatives of Roma and other vulnerable minority communities should be involved in the design, organization and direct participation in these events. This will help achieve several results: trust will be built between institutions and people from vulnerable communities, it will give the majority the opportunity to get to know their culture and customs.

**(3) Municipal policies and measures for building an inclusive educational environment.**



- **Involving local authorities in advocating for changes in the school network on the territory of the municipality to overcome the segregation of individual schools. Monitoring of educational segregation and follow-up advice/interventions to eradicate segregation practices inside the schools.**

The biggest problem in the education of children from vulnerable/isolated communities is their isolation from their peers in separate segregated schools. Studies show that the level of education in these schools is many times lower than in other schools in the respective municipality. It has been scientifically proven that the concentration of poverty, isolation and neglect of education in segregated schools leads to these results. The separation of children on the grounds of ethnic origin has profound consequences with long-lasting negative effects, including the instilling xenophobic and racist perceptions in the majority.

It is necessary for local authorities to actively engage in activities to overcome segregation. They can promote and advocate for restructuring the school network in such a way that children from the municipality study together, regardless of ethnic origin and cultural affiliation. Depending on the situation, local authorities can offer such an educational structure that does not allow for ethnic/cultural segregation. In parallel, local authorities should plan activities for the conflict-free acceptance of such a structure by all stakeholders in the municipality/district.

- **Municipal support is recommended for improvement of school infrastructure in particular for schools attended by disadvantaged students.**

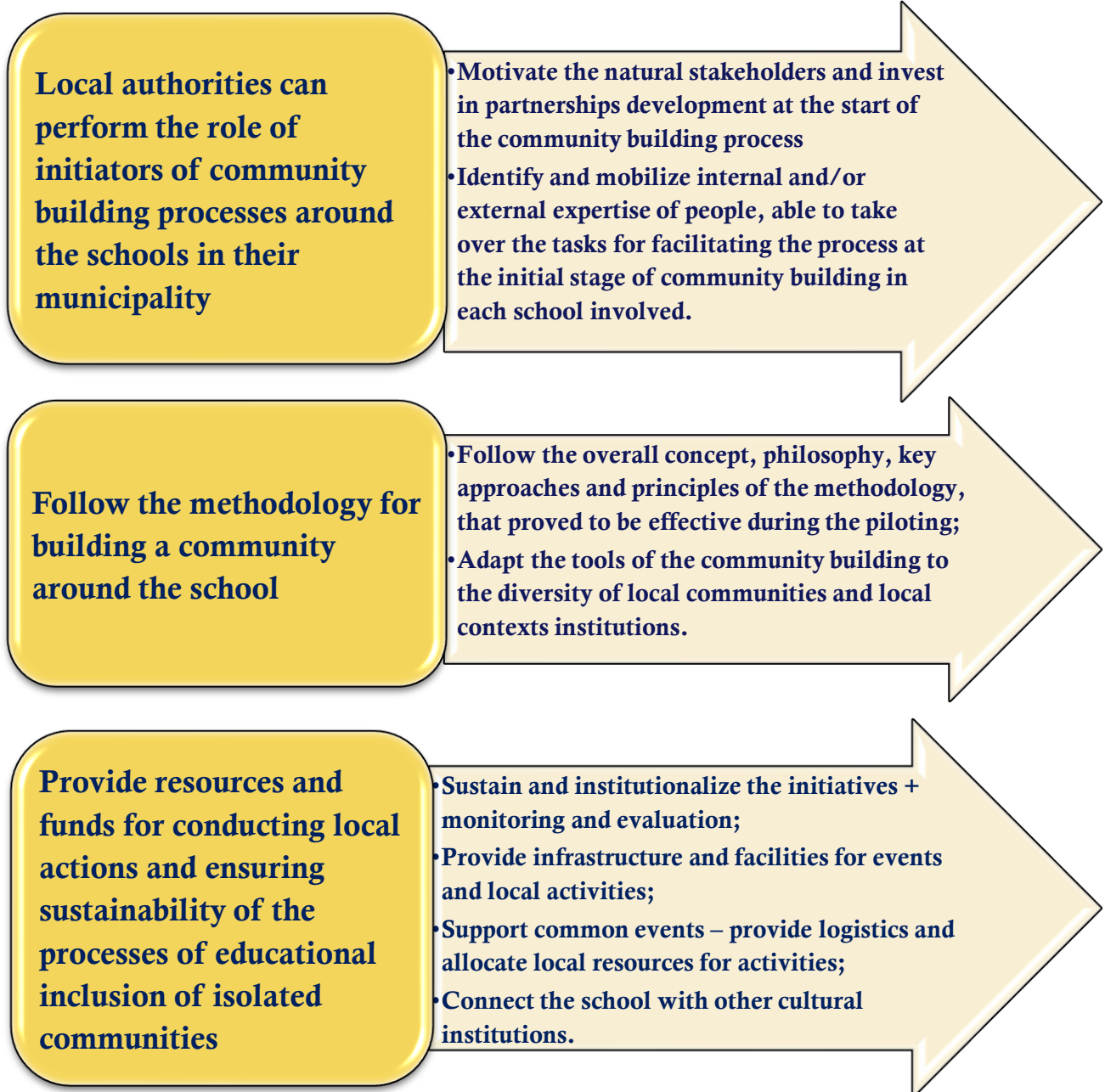
In isolated communities and villages, the school infrastructure, necessary for a normal educational process, is not at the required level. Usually, the funds allocated for its' improvement are much less than those allocated to other schools in the municipality. It is not really possible to build an inclusive educational environment there. Local authorities can contribute to the improvement of the educational infrastructure of disadvantaged schools in terms of buildings, facilities, equipment, cabinets and supplies for studying specific subjects, etc., by providing own resources and/or by attracting funds through projects or donations campaigns.

The involvement of local authorities in the process of inclusion of marginalized communities will be a sign of commitment to them and acknowledgment of Roma students as equals. This sign is aimed at both the minority and the majority and, with good governance, can lead to serious positive results in the field of educational inclusion – to creating an inclusive educational environment for all students in the municipality.



## 4.2 Recommendations for introducing community-centered approaches at local level

Practical recommendations to local authorities: how take the lead in initiating community building processes on their territory





Naturally, the local authorities could start with the development of a strategic vision for the introduction of the community-centered approaches in the educational network on the territory of the municipality, identifying the schools most in need of support, for starting activities and planning how to gradually involve other schools in the interventions. It is again a participatory effort, involving schools, local experts and educators.

**(1) Recommendations and advice on how local authorities can perform the role of initiators of community building processes around the schools in their municipality:**

The initiator's role for sure doesn't mean taking an enormous extra burden by the municipal administration. It is important to start with clarifications on the issue, considering the well-known fears and reluctance of institutions/administration to take over new untypical tasks and extra workload. As demonstrated during the piloting stage, the community building isn't a standalone effort, but the result of wide partnerships, involving a variety of people, schools, structures and institutions, which are directly interested in the outcomes of the community building. In overall terms, the local authorities, as initiators, are expected to mobilize partnerships, to motivate and support local actors to become engines of the process, to observe keeping the essential approaches and methods, and to follow the overall strategic targets, set by local participants.

- **Local authorities might focus great efforts in motivating the natural stakeholders, interested in promoting inclusive education for all children, and investing in partnerships development at the very start of the community building process.**

Mayors and local administrations have the potential to bring on board the schools, teachers and educators, local NGOs, working in the domains of education and Roma community development, educational institutions at the regional and local levels, researchers, community activists, institutions and professionals in social services, healthcare and employment, other local stakeholders and businesses. Local authorities have their power mechanisms to convince them to work together to build a community around the school.

- **Identify and mobilize internal and/or external expertise of people, able to take over the tasks for facilitating the process at the initial stage of community building in each school involved.**

The Mayor or a deputy Mayor could officially initiate the community building in the municipality as a leader of the process. In order to do the job in practice, it is recommended that the roles/tasks of the human resources be structured, mobilized in performing the community building initiatives. In the first place, it is recommended that a municipal expert be identified and assigned as a contact point for coordination between the municipal administration, the schools and local stakeholders, involved in the activities of different disadvantaged schools on the territory of the municipality.



School managers, teachers and local activists among the parents and community representatives are expected to become the engines of the process around "their" school/community, organizing the activities in close coordination with the municipal contact point.

Nevertheless, there is a need of content wise moderation of the participatory community planning, group discussions and community learning sessions. These tasks require specific expertise, which often is insufficient or missing, in particular, in small and poor municipalities having limited opportunities for social-economic development. Accordingly, the local authorities should point and attract experts for step-by-step facilitation of the process. Firstly, they might explore the internal potential of local NGOs and schools, identify and motivate persons for the task.

The experience in Bulgaria, Albania and Hungary proves that local NGOs and activists have the potential to take over the facilitation of events. Otherwise, local authorities might involve experienced external experts as facilitators, at least at the initial stages of the process. Along with the direct facilitation of events, such external experts should work together with the local people, supporting and consulting them in mobilizing schools and communities for participation, organizing the actions around the school, expanding local partnerships, etc. Building local capacity of the local people (activists, teachers, educators) and/or community organizations, is a task of crucial importance for the external experts, in order to enable local people to take over the role of facilitators and to continue the community building at the next stage of the process.

## **(2) Recommendations regarding the methodology for building a community around the school:**

- **Based on the experience, gained within the I4S project, we strongly recommend that the overall concept, philosophy, key approaches and principles of the methodology, which proved its' effectiveness during the piloting, be followed.**

The piloting has proved the relevance of the methodology design, initially set priorities/objectives, the key approaches, methods and tools. The three components of the process – participatory community planning, social action and community learning through open school classes – are relevant and effective interventions, complementing the impact on stakeholders involved. Despite the specifics of different communities and contexts, there are more or less **'universal' values and principles followed in the community building processes**, valid also for school-community partnerships, such as:

Community leadership of the process: The community building is a natural process within the community itself, which can be stimulated and reinforced by external actors, but it should be community led, involving the participation of the community members. The crucial task of the external facilitators, including the role of local authorities, is to empower the natural community leadership with knowledge, motivation and self-esteem to enable it to lead the process.



Participation of the community: The active participation of the diverse groups in the community and the individual members is a crucial indicator for the consolidation of the community. There is a variety of forms and methods, ensuring the participation of different community sub-groups and individuals.

Enhance communication and collaboration: Establish regular communication channels between schools, parents, and community stakeholders to maintain the momentum of the community-building efforts. This could include scheduled meetings, newsletters, and the use of digital platforms for continuous engagement.

Inclusive decision-making: Encourage the active participation of parents and community members in school decision-making processes. This can be facilitated through parent councils, community boards, and other forums that allow for meaningful input and collaboration.

Ownership of the community: It is crucial to ensure the growing sense of ownership of the community on the process, on the decisions and results – achievements and/or failures – of the joint actions. The community participants might feel like ‘hosts’ rather than ‘invitees’ in conducted various meetings and events. Frequent messages are very important in this direction, articulated by the external facilitators.

Voluntary participation of the community members – teachers, parents, local stakeholders: The efforts and contributions of the local people to the process are offered voluntarily, driven by their personal motivation and shared aspirations for positive change and collective benefits in community life. All local participants should be motivated to get involved on a voluntary basis.

Consensus-based decision-making: The common decisions and priority setting of the communities are reached through a process of discussions and exchange of opinions with respect to different opinions. The external facilitators can contribute by providing expertise and knowledge on the subject and by performing the process of discussions and participatory priority setting.

Respect to human rights, tolerance, non-discrimination and respect to diversities are obligatory principles. Unfortunately, the practical experience provides also negative examples of sub-communities consolidated around predominating discrimination attitudes and lack of tolerance to others, like ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ, people with disabilities, etc.; in other cases, there are detected negative prejudices between parents and teachers. Hence, from the very start of the process, the facilitators should encourage participants to overcome prejudices and build mutual trust.

- **Adapt the tools of the community building to the diversity of local communities and local contexts.**



The methodology for building a community around the school is specifically tailored to work in disadvantaged schools, with pupils and communities with high percentage of Roma, Egyptian, millet and other segregated minority groups, in a social environment, determined by deep inequalities, barriers and social distances between the co-existing diverse communities – a majority community and segregated minority communities. The methodology document is not a recipe and the performance of the action should be adapted to the local situation in each school/community.

**(3) Local authorities might provide resources and funds for conducting local actions and ensuring sustainability of the processes of educational inclusion of isolated communities.**

- **Sustain and Institutionalize the Initiatives.**

Institutional Support: Seek ongoing support from local governments and educational authorities to institutionalize the practices, developed during the community-building process. This could involve incorporating these practices into school policies and ensuring they are supported by adequate funding and resources.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress of the community-building initiatives and make necessary adjustments. Regular assessments can help ensure that the initiatives remain relevant and effective in meeting the needs of the community.

- **Provide infrastructure and facilities for events and local activities.**

Local authorities own/manage various infrastructure facilities for their intended purpose: cultural halls, sports halls, outdoor playgrounds, stadiums, etc. All of them are used by organized groups – theaters, orchestras, sports teams, etc. Isolated communities rarely have access to these facilities, often due to lack of information or concerns that obtaining a permit for use is very complicated. Municipalities need to ease the requirements for using their facilities and conduct an awareness campaign in this direction.

- **Supporting common events – providing logistics and allocating local resources for the implementation of activities.**

Resource allocation is crucial for ensuring that schools and communities have the necessary resources to maintain communication channels and carry out community engagement activities. This may require allocation of ongoing funding from the local government, NGOs, and/or initiating community fundraising campaigns. Additionally, training and support to schools to learn how to raise funds, will improve their access to funds for extra activities and continuation of large-scale events. It is necessary for municipal departments, dealing with mass cultural and sports events, to support people from isolated communities, when they initiate activities to show their culture or



sports achievements. This way, the majority will get to know these communities, which is a step towards integration.

- **Connecting the school with other cultural institutions.**

For the purposes of the interventions for overcoming the isolation of segregated communities, the schools need to attract as partners various cultural centers, sports organizations, which are based within the municipal administrative area. The facts show that most institutions of that type do not want to be associated with schools, where children from isolated communities predominate. This is a field, where the municipal government can take the role of a game-changer. It can act as an intermediary between the school and cultural and sports institutions. In some cases, it may even be necessary to exert pressure for taking the first steps towards rapprochement and subsequent cooperation.

**The community building is a long-term process following its own internal dynamics**, depending on the type of communities and issues addressed. The external community facilitators can push/influence for accelerating the process but to a limited extent with balanced and careful steps. The community activists and local stakeholders need to walk their own path, meanwhile gathering experience, understanding and perception of the action, in order to ensure the sustainability of the process. This is of critical importance in working with segregated vulnerable communities and groups where the risk of losing the motivation and support of the community is really high. The speaking and thinking of the local participants can easily turn back from *'our/my event'* to *'yours/your project event'*, meaning that the perception of the community ownership on the process is seriously endangered.

