

D6.7. Second Policy Brief



Name of the deliverable	Second policy brief
Number of the deliverable	D67
Related WP number and name	WP6 Communication & Dissemination
Deliverable dissemination level	Report/Public
Deliverable due date	30 April 2023
Deliverable submission date	original document: 30 April 2023 revised version: 20 November 2023
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Versioning and Contribution History

Version	Date	Author/Editor	Contributors	Description
_v1	24 April 2023.	Péter Krasztev	András Merza, Johanna Kardon	first version
_v2	26 April 2023.	Zsuzsanna Hanna Biró	Flórián Sipos, Barbara Szuromi	corrected version
_final	28 April 2023.	András Merza	András Merza, Béla Kardon	final version
_rev_v1	10 November 2023.	Péter Krasztev	András Merza, Barbara Szuromi, Béla Kardon	revision
_rev_v2	17. November 2023	Zsuzsanna Hanna Biró	Flórián Sipos	corrected version



Inclusion4Schools Project Summary

In the current European landscape, marked by widening inequalities, democratic crises, and community disintegration, the Central-Eastern European semi-peripheral, post-socialist context faces a resurgence of authoritarian, nationalist, and neoconservative discourses. This “retrotopia” fosters an illusion of social homogeneity, fuelling xenophobia, fear, and hatred towards perceived external intruders (e.g., migrants) and internal enemies (e.g., the Roma). This atmosphere of fear exacerbates existing divisions and leads to the creation of symbolic and physical walls.

The Inclusion4Schools project addresses these challenges with a primary focus on education. It targets the exclusionary walls, whether imaginary, symbolic, or real, that segregate children based on factors like class, ethnicity, and gender. These walls contribute to the active reproduction of inequalities within local communities. **In contrast to exclusionary power dynamics, the project aims to promote inclusive pedagogical relationships, a culture of dialogue, and the transformation of unjust structures through education.**

The project’s central objectives include supporting and coordinating community schools, seen as crucial to building and maintaining cohesive local communities, and creating a platform for sharing knowledge, praxis, and solidarity among these communities. By fostering convergence and synergies at local, regional, and transnational levels, the project aims to contribute to European initiatives addressing inequalities. Embracing a mission-oriented, impact-focused approach, the project seeks to enhance synergies between stakeholders, including teachers, researchers, local communities, and policymakers, to generate networks for policy development and promote the uptake of inclusive policies. The anticipated impact is aligned with broader European efforts to combat inequalities, emphasizing collaboration and policy integration.

Partners

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



Content

Inclusion4Schools Project Summary.....	2
Partners.....	2
Content.....	3
List of abbreviations.....	3
Preliminary notes about ongoing activities.....	4
1. Think-tank workshops with different stakeholders.....	5
2. Field-related activities: community building events and Open School Classes, focus group discussions.....	8
3. Professional work online.....	13

List of abbreviations

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



Preliminary notes about ongoing activities

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

The recommendations presented in the policy brief are still under discussion and will be described in detail in separate documents.



1. Think-tank workshops with different stakeholders

Over the course of the project, between April 2022 and January 2023, a total of 12 events were organized: 8 national ones taking place in person in different European countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia, Switzerland) and 4 online involving actors from more countries.

Background and objectives

The primary objectives of these activities were twofold: firstly, to generate ideas and suggestions aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of EU policies related to social inclusion, and secondly, to gather recommendations from diverse professionals in the field. The broader intention of the project was to amass suggestions from various professional groups for developing a methodology to identify key factors contributing to segregation. Participants, including researchers, policymakers, civil society representatives, municipalities, and teachers, engaged in discussions to analyse specific cases of segregation. Their goal was to determine the extent to which local situations were reflected in pre-research statistics and whether these statistics accurately portrayed the direction and magnitude of the national average. Additionally, experienced researchers provided insights into changes in data reporting systems and administrative support for research data collection between 2000 and 2020.

Topics discussed

Consensus emerged among participants that the approach and methodology, particularly regarding the professional composition of think-tank groups, provided a unique opportunity to confront diverse perspectives. They regarded it as highly innovative and revealing. The overarching conclusion was that **educational inequalities exist globally due to historical and cultural reasons**. While eliminating inequalities entirely may be ambitious, **the focus should be on influencing stakeholders to shape policy decisions that can address educational inequality in an informed, well-founded, and socially responsible manner**. To achieve this, participants emphasized the importance of making empirical data collected through quantitative methodologies available across Europe. The think-tank events successfully identified key issues for policy recommendations, underlining the importance of empirical research, data harmonization, and the need for a balanced approach to quantitative and qualitative data. The challenges of data comparability,



GDPR, and the trust deficit in marginalized communities were acknowledged, calling for nuanced and inclusive strategies in future research and policymaking.

Main policy-related findings of the Think-Tank events conducted:

1. Data Harmonization and Standardization:

- Encourage the harmonization of data on educational inequalities at both international and transnational levels. Develop standardized data collection methodologies to ensure comparability. Initiate a European policy or strategy to enhance the use of a standardized and comparable measurement tool on the member state level to measure the socioeconomic background of children (e.g. at competence tests).
- Promote cooperation between countries to agree on common data standards, especially regarding what constitutes "sensitive data." Address the challenges posed by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in data sharing and access.

2. Data Access and Transparency:

- Develop policies that facilitate easier access to different data sources for researchers working with statistical data. Ensure that quantitative data is readily available for comparative longitudinal and geographical research.
- Promote transparency in data collection and sharing processes. Create mechanisms for data access that respect privacy and security concerns while allowing researchers to work effectively.

3. Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Research:

- Recognize the value of both quantitative and qualitative research in understanding educational inequalities. Encourage researchers to consider the equal importance of both methods.
- Promote interdisciplinary research that combines quantitative data with qualitative insights to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional character of marginalization and segregation.
- For the methodological standardisation and territorial adaptation of qualitative research, develop a supportive environment with knowledge-sharing portals, repositories, toolkits, international workshops.



4. Community Involvement and bottom-up approach:

- Involve local community members, NGOs, and other stakeholders in the data collection process. Provide training and resources to local actors to participate in anti-segregation activities and improve schooling situations.
- Ensure that data collected at the local level is processed centrally and shared with local stakeholders. This empowers them to make informed decisions and develop local strategies based on the data.
- Provide financial and logistical support for community-based education activities and teacher training for local community members.

5. Addressing Trust and Reliability:

- Recognize that marginalized groups, such as the Roma, may have historical and political reasons to distrust central authorities collecting data. Develop strategies to build trust and ensure accurate data reporting, especially regarding ethnicity, living conditions, and socioeconomic status.
- Develop methodological tools to increase the participation rate in the voluntary socio-economic status surveys accompanying competence tests and enhance especially the participation of persons with vulnerable situations in them.
- Acknowledge the complexity of educational inequalities, including the intersections between various dimensions, and avoid over-simplification or labelling based on data.

6. International Collaboration:

- Initiate and organize a “Great Debate on Inequalities in Education” in the EU, exploiting the opportunities offered by Web2.0 and artificial intelligence.
- Encourage collaboration between countries and international organizations to address educational inequalities on a global scale. Share best practices and research findings to inform policy development.
- To understand the factors that counteract social disadvantage, longitudinal studies are needed to monitor the educational careers of pupils, alongside and independently of the current government data.



2. Field-related activities: community building events and Open School Classes, focus group discussions

2.1 Community building events

Background and objectives

The main objective of this segment is facilitating building a community of supporters around schools, which is hindered by insufficient cooperation among educational institutions and other actors at various levels. To address this, **future policy recommendations should prioritize motivating local authorities to collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and encourage self-mobilization within local communities.**

The ongoing implementation of this set of activities is progressing steadily, with discernible characteristics, anticipated outcomes, and identifiable challenges. **The recent findings from the Think-Tank segment of the project underscore the importance of refining methodologies to engage with local disadvantaged and segregated communities, emphasizing the necessity for collaborative content creation to enhance their integration.** Future policy research endeavours will centre on these aspects, seeking to further develop strategies for effective engagement.

Activities and topics

Despite being **in the midst of implementation**, the Community Building Events initiative has showcased promising results. The methodological framework, crafted through email exchanges and ten online methodology meetings, has **guided 45 events involving over 566 participants across four countries.** The **methodologies employed are tailored to local conditions, considering school situations and participant dynamics**, also including scenarios where illiterate parents participate. Notably, innovative approaches such as back-casting, involving planning steps for a desired future, have proven effective in guiding communities toward desirable outcomes.

Feedback highlights the success of linking data from the mapping phase (e.g., SWOT analysis) to action planning (e.g., small-scale hackathons). Co-creating topics with schools and ensuring interactivity between external facilitators and local participants are identified as key implementation elements. Challenges include the importance of addressing community-relevant issues and the necessity for cooperation between educational institutions and other stakeholders.



Furthermore, incentivizing teachers' participation in events is pivotal. Overcoming their reluctance, often stemming from perceiving it as extra, unpaid work, can be achieved through closer collaboration between NGOs, trainers, and educational authorities. Compensation for teachers' additional time spent on training can also be explored.

Moving forward, the consortium experts aim to foster cross-sectoral communication and mutual support, especially involving local authorities, NGOs, and educational institutions. **Policy measures should focus on promoting collaboration, incentivizing participation, and fostering a sense of shared responsibility. The next phase anticipates increased involvement from both institutions and parents, marking a significant stride toward collaborative efforts for the well-being of children.**

2.2. Open School Classes

Background and General Objectives

Open School Classes (OSC) are meant for adults, an informal interaction, an exchange of socio-cultural knowledge, resource. The events have been successfully initiated in partner countries, albeit in the early stages with approximately 3-4 events held in each country. These events, are of paramount importance to participants including teachers, parents, and local community representatives. **The Inclusion4Schools experts aim to formulate themes that not only benefit all participants but also foster a change in attitudes towards tolerance, incorporating participants' knowledge and expertise.**

Activities and topics

Even in the early stages, it is evident that educational professionals should encourage the expansion of education beyond traditional school boundaries. **Active participation in community activities is crucial to enhancing public relations, collaboratively combating early dropout rates, and engaging with experts and volunteers supporting students with special needs within the school-community network.** This outreach process not only connects schools with the community but also promotes formal and informal interactions, facilitating the exchange of social-cultural resources. **This collaborative effort aims to accumulate identifiable social and cultural capital within the network, leveraging the multiplication effect.**

Within the school-community network, activities involve a series of three discussion sessions, meticulously identifying local educational issues. Open classes, as part of this network, provide a secure and open space for discussing educational matters without bias. Key stakeholders in these activities include individuals interested in education, minority rights, policy-making, beneficiaries, local and national government representatives, civil society organizations, school principals, teachers,



school psychologists, social workers, individual activists, and parents' representatives.

The OSC methodology and concept prove particularly effective in sensitive situations, as demonstrated by a case in Albania where a school had been declared segregated by the European Human Rights Court. In such delicate circumstances, the OSC methodology was instrumental. The audience, highly sensitive, and the school principal, keen on addressing segregation issues, sought possible solutions within the legal framework, including changes in administrative divisions to prevent the accumulation of Roma students in a single school

Anticipated policy recommendations derived from Community Building Events and Open School Classes:

1. **Local Authority and NGO Collaboration:** Encourage policies that motivate local authorities to cooperate with NGOs to mobilize different segments of the local communities, such as parents' associations and self-help communities. This collaboration can help overcome barriers to parental involvement in community-building events.
2. **Teacher Engagement Incentives:** Develop policies that address the reluctance of teachers to participate in community events due to concerns about extra unpaid work. Consider compensation mechanisms for teachers who invest their extra time in training and community engagement.
3. **Cross-Sectoral Communication:** Promote policies that facilitate cross-sectoral communication and mutual support among educational institutions, cultural institutions, social services, child protection agencies, health care providers, and local civil society organizations. Encourage these entities to collaborate in the interest of children.
4. **Institutional and Parental Involvement:** Create policies that incentivize both educational institutions and parents to become more actively involved and engaged in community-building events. Foster a sense of joint responsibility for children's education and well-being.
5. **Professional Development:** Establish policies that support the professional development of educators to encourage their involvement in community activities. Provide training and resources to help educators extend education beyond the school walls and engage with experts and volunteers who assist students with special needs.
6. **Outreach and Community Integration:** Encourage policies that promote the extension of education beyond school boundaries and into the community. Recognize the value of formal and informal interactions and the exchange of



social-cultural resources between schools and communities. Create policies that facilitate the accumulation of social and cultural capital within the network.

7. **Identifying Local Educational Issues:** Support policies that involve stakeholders in identifying and addressing local educational issues with precision. Promote a series of discussion sessions within the school-community network to foster collaboration among interested parties.
8. **Safe and Inclusive Open Classes:** Develop policies that ensure open classes provide a safe and inclusive space for discussing educational matters without prejudice. Encourage the participation of individuals interested in education, minority rights, and policy-making, as well as parents, activists, and community representatives.
9. **Utilizing the OSC Methodology:** Promote the utilization of the Open School Classroom (OSC) methodology, particularly in locations with delicate situations, to address segregation and sensitive issues effectively. Guide on applying legal measures to promote inclusion and diversity

2.3 Focus group discussions

The aim of the focus groups is to promote dialogue between teachers and academics including classical pedagogues, lecturers in social pedagogy, teaching in multicultural environments, methodologists in certain subjects - history, geography as well as primary teachers, teachers with different profiles (e.g., information and computer technologies) to develop specialised university programmes at two levels: for students, future teachers, and for the qualification of teachers working in disadvantaged schools.

The demand for policy development strictly drawn from social research in education producing particularly qualitative data is almost non-existent. This hiatus makes it also go unnoticed that the scientific terminology is missing; consequently, the discussions in education research circles are often misleading or irrelevant.

The focus group component of the project has recently started, and four events have been conducted so far.



Anticipated policy recommendations derived from the focus group discussions:

1. **Teacher-Academic Dialogue:** Encourage policies that promote dialogue between teachers and academics, including experts in pedagogy, social pedagogy, multicultural education, and methodologists. Create platforms for collaboration and information exchange.
2. **Scientific Terminology Alignment:** Support policies that aim to align educational discussions with scientific terminology. Ensure that educational research and discussions are based on a common and precise language, enhancing the relevance of education research in policy circles.
3. **Specialized University Programs:** Develop policies that facilitate the creation of specialized university programs at two levels: a. Programs for students aspiring to become teachers, emphasizing research and policy literacy in their training. b. Programs for in-service teachers, especially those working in disadvantaged schools, to enhance their qualifications and research skills.
4. **Teacher Agency Recognition:** Recognize teachers as professionals with agency in shaping educational policies. Encourage policies that empower teachers to contribute to research and policy development processes, thus initiating the recognition of their professional agency.
5. **Terminology Workshops:** Launch policies to initiate a series of workshops aimed at clarifying and establishing commonly agreed-upon terminology in the education field. These workshops should involve researchers, tutors, and teachers, preferably in an interdisciplinary setting, to improve the quality of discussions and policy relevance.

These policy recommendations aim to enhance community engagement, promote collaboration among diverse stakeholders, improve the quality of education discussions, and empower teachers to play a more active role in research and policy development processes.

3. Professional work online

Knowledge Sharing Portal and its relevance to the further EU policies

The portal serves as a repository for schools, institutions, non-profit organizations, and initiatives focused on segregated and disadvantaged students, emphasizing inclusion. It aims to unite diverse stakeholders, including teachers, researchers, schools, civilians, and higher education institutions. The information on the portal is available in multiple languages, fostering collaboration, thought-sharing, relationship building, and network creation. The upcoming challenge is expanding the portal's reach to engage new participants, particularly researchers and higher education institutions.

Launching in May 2023, the <https://i4sportal.movelex.hu/> portal will **feature a workshop function for collaborative work and thinking, a document library containing research and writings, and tools for building relationships with institutions, accessing good practices, and finding document authors and project partners.** The ultimate goal is to establish the portal as the most comprehensive professional hub for anti-segregation policies, earning endorsement from EU institutions and instilling a sense of security in countries with highly centralized education systems.

Online Methodological Workshops to develop analysis and evaluation methodology

This project segment, in its early stages, conducts online seminars using the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) to introduce participants to the Social Systems Evaluation (SSE) method. **The SSE method differs from mandatory internal or external evaluation procedures, focusing on participants identifying issues, problems, practices, phenomena, obstacles, and difficulties requiring change in their schools or institutions.**

Even at this nascent stage, challenges and potential policy recommendations emerge. The prevailing top-down education system in Hungary discourages autonomy, choice, and decision-making in schools. Participants struggle to comprehend SSE, rooted in action research, as distinct from mandatory internal evaluation procedures due to a lack of familiarity with autonomous action.



Anticipated policy recommendations derived from online work:

1. **Teacher Education Curricula Enhancement:** Introduce courses on organizational evaluation in teacher education curricula, emphasizing its significance for school improvement and effectiveness.
2. **In-Service Teacher Development Courses:** Offer in-service teacher development courses focused on knowledge and competencies related to organizational evaluation.
3. **Research on Legally Binding School Evaluation Types:** Investigate existing legally binding school evaluation types to determine their alignment with OECD and EU recommendations.
4. **Interdisciplinary and Qualitative Research:** Prioritize interdisciplinary and qualitative research to understand the reality of schools and provide practical support to those facing multiple disadvantages, enabling them to design and implement effective pedagogical practices for their pupils.

These preliminary recommendations aim to enhance educational policies, foster autonomy, and contribute to the success of the Knowledge Sharing Portal, ultimately supporting anti-segregation efforts and aligning with EU goals.

