

D6.8. Third Policy Brief



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Inclusion4Schools Project Summary

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

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

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



Partners

Participant No	Participant organisation name	Country
1 (Coordinator)	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

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



The 5 main policy recommendations derived from the final I4S conclusions

1. Empower Local Educational Institutions with Greater Autonomy to Strengthen Inclusive Practices (National Recommendation)

National educational authorities should grant local schools more flexibility in implementing inclusive practices. This would allow schools to tailor their inclusive programs and classroom strategies to the specific needs of Roma and marginalized students, thereby enhancing local solutions and improving the overall effectiveness of inclusive education.¹

2. Ensure Sustainability and Scaling (EU Recommendation)

The EU should focus on securing long-term funding for community engagement initiatives and embedding inclusive programs within national education strategies. By doing so, the EU can ensure that successful educational reforms continue to benefit marginalized communities and are scalable across member states.²

3. Enhance Local Data Collection and Empower Communities for Monitoring Educational Inequalities (National Recommendation)

National educational authorities should develop disaggregated data collection protocols that capture the social backgrounds of students, allowing for more precise interventions. Additionally, empowering local communities to monitor educational inequalities ensures that policies can be quickly adjusted to address specific local needs.³

¹ The I4S project findings align with the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success (2022/C 469/01), Article 2, which calls for systemic approaches to improve educational inclusion and prevent school dropout. By granting local schools greater autonomy, the project findings highlight the need for locally adapted solutions to address the diverse challenges of marginalized students, particularly Roma learners.

² The project's emphasis on long-term funding and embedding inclusive programs within national strategies supports the European Education Area (COM/2020/625 final, p. 10), which prioritizes sustainable education reforms. The I4S findings reinforce the importance of scaling successful initiatives beyond project-based interventions to ensure lasting impact for marginalized communities.

³ The I4S project findings underscore the importance of precise, disaggregated data collection to monitor educational inequalities, aligning with the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success (2022/C 469/01), Article 5. The project's evidence suggests that empowering communities to participate in data collection enhances policy responsiveness and ensures that interventions remain relevant to local needs.



4. Establish EU-Wide Monitoring Systems and a Standardized Data Collection on Social Backgrounds (EU Recommendation)

EU decision makers should invest in standardized, transparent data collection systems that track educational inequalities across all member states. This will ensure that data on students' social backgrounds is comparable and helps to foster more equitable educational practices across the EU.⁴

5. Strengthen School-University Partnerships and Foster Inclusive Teacher Education (National Recommendation)

Educational authorities should encourage formal collaborations between schools and universities to improve teacher training. This partnership should focus on shared research, pedagogical innovations, and incorporating multidisciplinary knowledge to equip teachers with tools to address diversity and promote social justice in classrooms.⁵

⁴ The I4S research highlights the lack of harmonized data collection across EU member states, which hinders comparative research on educational inequalities. This supports the European Education Area (COM/2020/625 final, p. 14) and the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success (2022/C 469/01), Article 5, both of which call for standardized, transparent EU-wide data collection to track disparities and improve policy design.

⁵ The findings of the I4S project reinforce the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success (2022/C 469/01), Article 4, which emphasizes the need for well-prepared teachers to support diverse classrooms. By advocating for school-university partnerships and multidisciplinary teacher education, the project demonstrates how collaborative models can improve pedagogical innovation and inclusive teaching practices.

I. School and community-building programs: Impact Analysis conclusions and policy recommendations

1. Purpose of Impact Analysis

Impact analysis was conducted concluding the Inclusion4Schools project to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of school and community-building programs across the four partner countries: Hungary, Albania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. This analysis serves to measure program impact, refine implementation strategies, and advocate for policy changes.⁶

The main aims of this analysis were:

- a) **To check the accountability and continuous improvement of actions undertaken:** Impact Analysis highlights the importance of data collection to monitor progress, identify deviations, and adapt to challenges.⁷
- b) **Learning and Experience Sharing:** Impact Analysis provides insights into how participants and facilitators engage with the program, fostering better understanding of practical delivery methods.
- c) **Derive actionable policy recommendations:** Results inform policy by demonstrating the importance of inclusive programs and identifying successful methods for replication.

⁶ For more details, see **D1.4 Report on the Results of the Social Impact Analysis**.

⁷ The I4S findings support the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success (2022/C 469/01), Article 6, which stresses the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective implementation of inclusive education policies. The project results indicate that regular data collection and impact assessments help track progress and adapt strategies to evolving challenges.

2. Key Findings and Significant Conclusions

Impact Analysis draws on a combination of quantitative attitude tests (pre- and post-intervention) and qualitative feedback (focus groups and moderator reports). The study targeted both stakeholders (educators, civil workers, school leaders) and local community members (parents, residents).

2.1. Attitudinal Shifts Toward Social Change and Disadvantaged Groups

- **Solidarity and Empathy:**
 - Albania and Bulgaria showed significant improvements in solidarity and empathy toward disadvantaged groups.
 - Hungary demonstrated minimal change, while Slovakia registered slight declines in empathy post-intervention.
- **Perceptions of Injustice:**
 - In Albania and Bulgaria, participants' recognition of inequality, segregation, and discrimination increased significantly.
 - In Slovakia, perceptions of social injustice declined post-intervention, suggesting limited impact.

2.2. Attitudes Toward Roma Populations

- **Competence and Warmth Perceptions:**
 - In Bulgaria, significant improvements were recorded in perceptions of Roma people's competence and cultural specificities.
 - Albania showed moderate gains, while Hungary's results remained largely unchanged.
 - Slovakia experienced a slight decline in competence ratings of Roma individuals.



- **Paternalistic Attitudes:**

- Across all countries, paternalistic educational attitudes increased, indicating a preference for protective but condescending approaches to Roma students. This trend poses a concern for reinforcing hierarchical biases.⁸

2.3. Collective Efficacy and Community Engagement

- **Efficacy and Hope:**

- Albania and Bulgaria reported significant increases in collective and self-efficacy, reflecting improved confidence in participants' ability to effect social change.
- Hungary showed marginal declines in civil efficacy, while Slovakia experienced minimal change.

- **Community Building and Collaboration:**

- Albania and Bulgaria displayed stronger community-driven initiatives and increased collaboration.
- Hungary saw mixed results, with declining community engagement over time.
- In Slovakia, reliance on professional networks decreased post-intervention.

⁸ The project's findings regarding paternalistic attitudes towards Roma students align with Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success (2022/C 469/01), Recital 16, which warns against hierarchical, protective approaches that may reinforce biases instead of fostering genuine inclusion. The I4S results emphasize the need for training educators in culturally responsive and equity-focused pedagogy.

3. Policy Recommendations Based on Impact Analysis

The analysis provides insights into potential policy actions to sustain and scale program impact⁹:

- **Strengthen Inclusive Educational Practices:**
 - Mandate teacher training programs to address implicit biases and reduce paternalistic attitudes toward Roma students.¹⁰
 - Promote classroom strategies that encourage equal treatment and inclusion.
- **Enhance Community Involvement:**
 - Institutionalize participatory governance models in schools to integrate community feedback in educational decision-making.¹¹
 - Establish community liaison roles within schools to facilitate communication between educators and local stakeholders.
- **Support Leadership and Professional Development:**
 - Implement leadership training for school principals, focusing on inclusive practices and community engagement strategies.
 - Encourage peer-learning networks that allow educational leaders from different regions to exchange best practices.

⁹ For a more detailed list of recommendations see: **D3.4 Recommendations to educational managers of public education** and **D3.6 Recommendations To Local Authorities**.

¹⁰ The I4S recommendations on teacher training to address implicit biases are in line with the European Education Area (COM/2020/625 final, p. 11), which advocates for professional development programs that challenge discrimination and promote inclusive education. The project's findings provide empirical support for the need to integrate antibias training into teacher education.

¹¹ The I4S project findings reinforce Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success (2022/C 469/01), Article 3, which calls for greater cooperation between schools and communities to support at-risk learners. By demonstrating the benefits of participatory governance models and school-community partnerships, the project provides concrete evidence that engaging local stakeholders enhances educational inclusion and student well-being.

- **Broaden Stakeholder Collaboration:**
 - Develop partnerships between municipalities, schools, and NGOs to co-create solutions for educational inequality.
 - Incentivize joint community-school initiatives to promote social cohesion and address prejudice.
- **Ensure Sustainability and Scaling:**
 - Secure long-term funding for community engagement initiatives beyond project timelines.
 - Embed inclusion-focused programs into national education strategies to promote systemic change.

II. Statistically measuring and tackling social differences in education

1. Purpose of statistically measuring and tackling social differences in education

The recommendations outlined in the Inclusion4Schools (I4S) project stem from a pressing need to address growing social and educational inequalities across Europe. This highlighted the urgent need for more consistent data collection practices to facilitate meaningful comparative research on educational inequalities.¹²

The main aims of this analysis were:

- a) **Addressing Structural Inequalities:** Persistent social and educational gaps remain unresolved despite numerous EU policies.
- b) **Enhancing Data-Driven Policy:** The lack of comprehensive, standardized data collection on educational inequalities hinders evidence-based policymaking.
- c) **Promoting Inclusive Education:** Marginalized communities face systemic barriers in accessing quality education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.

¹² For more details, see **Recommendations to National Data Services**.

- d) **Building Local and National Capacity:** Strengthening collaboration between schools, universities, and policymakers is essential to sustain inclusive education initiatives.

2. Key Findings and Significant Conclusions

Over the course of 12 events—four held online and eight in person across Hungary, Slovakia, Albania, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Portugal, Lithuania, and Greece—the project reached out to over 4,000 experts, with 195 actively participating. Discussions revealed that despite efforts to standardize data across Europe, significant disparities remain, particularly regarding what constitutes ‘sensitive data’ in different countries.

- a) **Interconnected Challenges:** Educational inequalities are deeply intertwined with economic, regional, and social disparities. Addressing one aspect in isolation is insufficient.
- b) **Inadequate Data and Transparency:** The absence of harmonized data collection methods across EU countries prevents accurate measurement of educational inequalities.
- c) **Community Engagement:** Locally-driven initiatives show potential in mitigating segregation but require sustained policy support and funding.
- d) **Policy Gaps in Inclusion:** Despite legal frameworks (e.g., the EU Racial Equality Directive), practical implementation often falls short, favouring dominant social groups.
- e) **Long-Term Impact and Monitoring:** Continuous monitoring and resilience research are critical to track and address inequalities over time.



3. Policy Recommendations Based on Statistical Measuring and Data Collection Research

The research findings on educational inequalities and territorial disparities within European countries have provided a robust basis for a series of comprehensive recommendations aimed at addressing these pressing issues.

- **Standardized Data Collection on Social Backgrounds**
 - Develop EU-wide protocols for measuring social backgrounds of children in all member states. Avoid composite indices that obscure disparities and instead focus on transparent, disaggregated data collection.¹³
- **Long-Term Monitoring and Tracking Systems**
 - Establish EU-wide monitoring systems to track educational inequalities over time. A dedicated agency should oversee data collection and dissemination, ensuring transparency and comparability across regions.¹⁴
- **Qualitative and Localized Research**
 - Support micro-level qualitative research that investigates local phenomena contributing to educational inequalities. Encourage partnerships between educational institutions and local communities to contextualize interventions.¹⁵
- **Enhancing Data Transparency and Accessibility**
 - Increase access to educational data by ensuring GDPR-compliant protocols while safeguarding individual privacy. Make statistical data, census information, and educational records available to researchers and policymakers.¹⁶

¹³ Supports Council Recommendation (2022/C 469/01), Article 5, which emphasizes the importance of data collection and monitoring systems to improve educational equity.

¹⁴ Also aligns with European Education Area (COM/2020/625 final, p. 14), calling for harmonized monitoring systems across the EU to track educational inequalities.

¹⁵ Reinforces Council Recommendation (2022/C 469/01), Article 5, which urges EU countries to use qualitative research alongside statistical methods.

¹⁶ Supports Council Recommendation (2022/C 469/01), Article 5, which highlights data transparency and accessibility as key to evidence-based policymaking.

- **Civil Monitoring of Educational Inequalities**
 - Establish community-led monitoring systems that track incidents of segregation and educational inequalities. This mechanism would provide real-time feedback and inform pre-emptive policy adjustments.¹⁷

III. School-University Partnership project segment: conclusions and recommendations

1. Purpose of School-University Partnership activities

The rationale behind developing the school-university partnership project segment is rooted in addressing educational inequalities and segregation, particularly in disadvantaged and segregated schools across Central and Eastern Europe. The analysis underscores the need to enhance teacher training, align theoretical frameworks with practical experiences, and promote inclusive educational environments. A core driver is the observed gap between academic research and the empirical on-the-ground experiences of teachers in underprivileged settings.¹⁸

The main aims of this analysis were:

- a) **Addressing systemic segregation and social exclusion through inclusive pedagogy.**
- b) **Encouraging collaboration between teacher training institutions and public schools to improve educational outcomes.**
- c) **Developing shared strategies to support trainee teachers in navigating diverse, often challenging school environments.**

¹⁷ Aligns with Council Recommendation (2022/C 469/01), Article 3, promoting civil society participation in monitoring education inequalities.

¹⁸ For more details see **D3.3. School-University Partnership and Recommendations to Teacher Training Institutes**, available at <https://inclusion4schools.eu/achievements/d3-3-school-university-partnership-and-recommendations-to-teacher-training-institutes/>



- d) **Bridging the disconnect between university curricula and the real-life needs of disadvantaged communities.**

2. Key Findings and Significant Conclusions

The document outlines that fostering inclusive education requires an interdisciplinary, practice-driven approach. School-university partnerships serve as a vehicle to integrate theory with practical teaching methods, ensuring future educators are better equipped to work in diverse environments.

- a) **Multidisciplinary Approach:** Teacher training must incorporate sociology, cultural studies, psychology, and communication to diagnose and address the root causes of educational inequalities.¹⁹
- b) **Hands-on Experience:** Trainee teachers benefit from immersive, real-world experiences in disadvantaged schools, fostering competencies beyond general pedagogical knowledge.²⁰
- c) **Leadership and Management Skills:** School leaders play a pivotal role in fostering inclusive environments. Training in leadership and organizational management is essential.²¹
- d) **Collaborative Research:** Universities must involve teachers in research, fostering mutual learning and grounding academic inquiry in practical school environments.²²
- e) **Diversified Teaching Practice:** Teaching practice should reflect the complexities of diverse educational contexts, requiring active collaboration between schools and universities.²³

¹⁹ Aligns with European Education Area (COM/2020/625 final, p. 11), which advocates for interdisciplinary approaches in teacher training.

²⁰ Reinforces Council Recommendation (2022/C 469/01), Article 4, which emphasizes practical experience for future educators.

²¹ Supports Council Recommendation (2022/C 469/01), Article 6, which stresses the need for school leadership training in inclusive education.

²² Aligns with Council Recommendation (2022/C 469/01), Article 4, encouraging research collaboration between universities and schools.

²³ Supports European Education Area (COM/2020/625 final, p. 10), calling for diversified teaching placements.



3. Policy Recommendations Based on School-University Partnership activities

- a) **Strengthen School-University Partnerships** by establishing formalized agreements between schools and universities to facilitate continuous collaboration. Focus on shared research, pedagogical innovations, and cross-institutional mentorship programs.
- b) **Embed Multidisciplinary Knowledge in Teacher Training:** Integrate courses covering sociology, cultural anthropology, communication studies, and minority rights into teacher training curricula. Develop specialized modules on inclusive education, intercultural competencies, and social justice.
- c) **Enhance Practical Teaching Experiences:** Establish mentorship programs pairing trainee teachers with experienced educators in diverse educational settings. Encourage universities to recognize and incentivize schools participating in training partnerships.
- d) **Leadership and Organizational Development:** Embed leadership and school management training into teacher education programs. Develop workshops and study groups involving school principals, university tutors, and trainee teachers to foster leadership competencies.
- e) **Ensure Diversity in Teaching Practice:** Mandate trainee teacher placements in a variety of school environments, ensuring exposure to diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts. Encourage experiential learning through interdisciplinary team projects, case studies, and action research in partnership schools.
- f) **Sustain Community Engagement:** Develop long-term community engagement programs that foster collaboration between local stakeholders, schools, and teacher training institutions. Institutionalize community-based projects as part of teacher education curricula, promoting sustainable and inclusive educational reforms.²⁴

²⁴ Reinforces Council Recommendation (2022/C 469/01), Article 3, promoting community-driven educational engagement.