EU Challenge to Build a Cohesive and Diverse Society

Step by Step towards Inclusion in School

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Inclusion of Roma and Migrants in Schools

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A Case of Roma and Migrant Population

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Introduction

Socio-political and demographic changes in Europe have, among other things, imposed a new way of functioning of the social organization system, which is reflected in many ways. Not even the education system survived this tempo of change. Reorganizing the European system in social, economic and political terms has, on a broader scale, also had a significant impact on European policymaking.

All those major changes, namely demographic changes and migration have created favorable circumstances for preparation of a unified educational system, suitable for all cultures currently building the social fabric of Europe. The concept of a heterogeneously structured society significantly influenced designing of new strategies in the European education system.

The approach, adopted by all six project partners, included a review of possible ways of involving the Roma community into European society, particularly in the project partner countries (Slovenia, Germany, Spain, Italy, Turkey and North Macedonia).

In the European space, a developing trend of migrant and the Roma community integration into the education system has been addressed a lot recently, primarily to enable finding the most appropriate modules for individual countries in order for them to apply the most appropriate modes of this education policy. This trend of multinational functioning of an education system, embedded within a common European space, made it possible to distinguish different country approaches which more or less deal with the integration aspect of migrants and Roma.

Individual project partners' practices present particular cultures of approach, varying across Europe and beyond. The practice of intercultural dialogue represents a vital element in both communication and educational integration. It has also created preconditions for building cadres, tailor-made to teachers' needs, focusing on integration of the Roma community and migrants into the education system, particularly in countries that are part of this project.

The first chapter of this book gives some insight in the role of a family in European societies; family aspect represents an important part of the project due to its tremendous effect on Roma and migrant

integration. Psychologists, dealing with new migrants arriving from different countries, are also indispensable in the domain of Roma integration; the same goes for volunteers involved in the process.

The second chapter focuses on international practice of the countries, participating in the project. Being faced with migrants and the need to integrate the Roma community into international practice, their objective reality is focused on interpolation of practical experience; by its direct effect on creation of the public image, the country is associated with experience it conveys to the general public.

The content of this chapter focuses on both the system of inclusion, as well as on that of migrant and Roma education in Spain, Slovenia, Turkey, North Macedonia, Germany and Italy, sharing and describing best practices.

The third chapter of the book considers the specifics of every country, with particular emphasis on the role of schools, as well as on description of Roma and migrant inclusion in the education system model. Special mention is given to the work of volunteers, since they are being a very important part of the process.

Within the same chapter, the last section gives some recommendations concerning a very important part of public education policies within the education system of the countries involved in this project.

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We acknowledge all the researchers and trainers who contributed to the implementation of the RoMigSc project. We would especially like to thank all people who have not had a say in this text but have contributed their competences and passion to the project, an extraordinary thanks to all volunteers that devoted their time to migrant and Roma kids, helping them to achieve better results in schools and to become more included into society.

Last acknowledgement goes to EACEA – the agency that believed in our project proposal and supported the project during the three years of implementation.

About the RoMigSc Project

The RoMigSc project aims to contribute to the general objective of a call (EACEA/05/2016) in the framework of the Erasmus+ program key action 'Support for Policy Reform' – to foster inclusion of disadvantaged learners, including persons with migrant background, while preventing and combating discriminatory practices. It additionally aims to contribute to specific objectives: creating inclusive and democratic learning environments, encouraging youth participation in social and civic life and developing inclusion and outreach practices to reach young people.

This specific project aims to foster better integration of Roma and migrant children in education process through various activities such as teacher training, e-platforms on intercultural topics, a series of guided learning opportunities for teachers, children, their parents, volunteers and all other citizens, as well as training for volunteers working with Roma and migrant children, to provide them with unique skills and competencies. Young volunteers should conduct volunteering activities for Roma children and migrants in order to better include them in schools and local communities. National seminars for different stakeholders should be organized (policymakers, school directors, academics/researchers and representatives of the public authority. Furthermore, an international conference should be held to disseminate project results at a larger scale.

General aspects, considered by partners from Slovenia, the Republic of North Macedonia, Italy, Turkey, Germany and Spain during the preparation of the project, were: situation of migrant (particularly refugee) children, situation of Roma children in Europe and volunteerism as the main contribution of the civil society to mitigation of some problematic phenomena in this context.

The RoMigSc project application summarizes the facts and ideas that motivated RoMigSc partners to promote innovation and development in the field: 'There is clear and consistent evidence that many children of migrants have lower levels of educational attainment than their peers. The PIRLS survey on literacy shows migrant children scoring less well than their non-migrant peers by the end of primary school. The OECD PISA survey on standard academic skills of 15-year-

olds confirms that migrant children in this age group tend to perform less well systematically than host countries' children across each of the tested subject areas, science, and mathematics and, most strikingly, reading. Migrant children are more likely to drop out than host country children. The latter is especially the case for children from third-country nations: they have some critical, and specific, education needs that are not currently met through mainstream education policy. According to ETM, the share of early school leaving among foreign-born learners in the EU is nearly twice as high as among the total population' (in the EU, it was 12.7%, while the equivalent rate for third-country nationals was 26.5%).

United Nations records show that more than half of all Syrian refugees are under the age of 18. Such a large share of children and youth offers a significant opportunity: if host countries ensure quick access to quality education and training opportunities, they can provide this young, but disadvantaged, generation of refugees with tools to succeed – either in their host country or eventually back home. Education also represents an essential means of transmitting host country values and providing orientation on civic life. It is clear that education and training should be the focal point of successful integration efforts.

Migrant children often find it impossible to present their culture (discrimination against existence of their culture). Due to multiculturalism, and in order to avoid stereotypes and monocultural orientations (not only presenting European authors, but the ones from third countries as well), the need to change curricula in primary and secondary school appears.

The problem of access to non-compulsory education for undocumented children. While participation in compulsory education is often possible for undocumented children, the fact that the legislation is unclear commonly results in administrative barriers, limitations in taking official examinations and receiving certification, and exclusion from non-compulsory education.
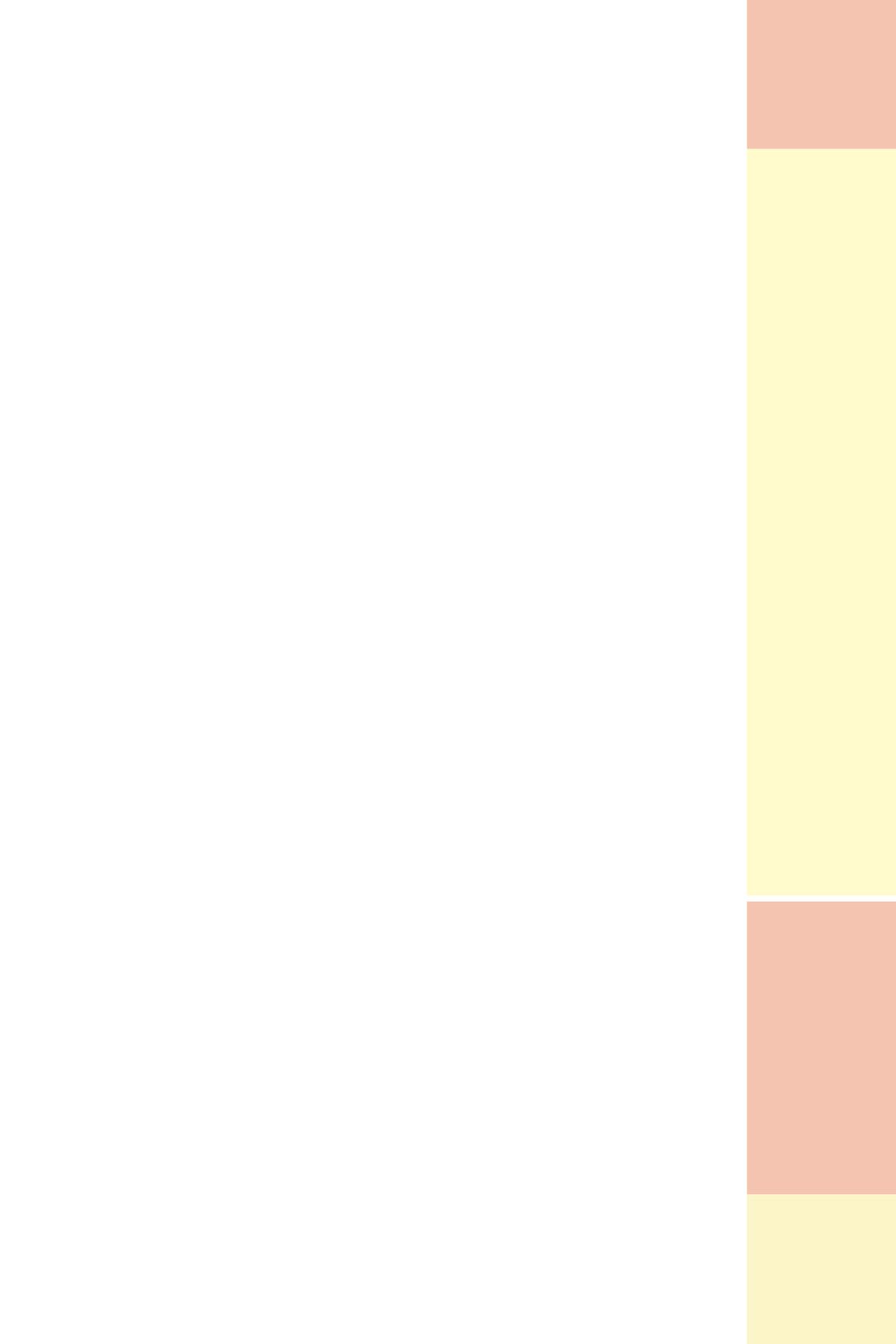
The main Roma issues: 'On average, only one in two Roma children attend pre-school or kindergarten; only 42% of Roma children complete primary school in some EU Member States. Participation in education drops considerably after compulsory school, with only 15% of young Roma adults completing upper-secondary education, on average.' Further problems, identified as starting points of poten-

tial intervention analysis are: segregation of Roma children in special needs schools and often-weak involvement of parents. Project partners identified some examples of good practices, namely how to intervene in problematic situations, as potential practices that could be upscaled; a good example being Roma school assistants (mainly of Roma origin) that can help with bridging the gap between Roma communities and schools.

Experience, both local and national, recognizes volunteering as an essential part of solutions to problems described. Partners experienced several aspects of positive outcomes of volunteering activities, such as helping Roma and migrants to integrate into society better and promoting the feeling of not being alone in challenging moments. In recent years, a lot of attention has been paid to volunteering as a driving force for social inclusion of youth.

Volunteering can complement formal education by teaching young people practical skills that enhance their employability. Voluntary activities are recognized as rich learning experience enabling the development of social skills and competencies. Volunteering can also improve career prospects and progression of young people by enhancing their job-related skills – from cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution to evaluation and management, problem-solving and leadership skills.

Volunteering is, however, far from having fulfilled its potential. According to Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2007), 16% of people aged between 15 and 30 declare to be regularly or occasionally engaged in voluntary activities and only 2% report that they regularly participate in voluntary or community work, while three out of four young people consider volunteering as an incentive for greater participation in society. The problem leading to relatively low turnout of young people in volunteering activities is also that, in most cases, young volunteers do not receive any certification for their work and that skills acquired through voluntary actions are not recognized enough for their value as an essential form of non-formal learning.

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All those major changes, namely demographic changes and migration have created favorable circumstances for preparation of a unified educational system, suitable for all cultures currently building the social fabric of Europe. The concept of a heterogeneously structured society significantly influenced designing of new strategies in the European education system.

In the European space, a developing trend of migrant and the Roma community integration into the education system has been addressed a lot recently, primarily to enable finding the most appropriate modules for individual countries in order for them to apply the most appropriate modes of this education policy. This trend of multinational functioning of an education system, embedded within a common European space, made it possible to distinguish different country approaches which more or less deal with the integration aspect of migrants and Roma.