



**The European Union/Council of Europe Joint Project “Inclusive Schools: Making a Difference for Roma Children”
(INSCHOOL 3)**

**Final Conference Report
28 May 2024 Brussels, Belgium**

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Inclusive Schools: Making a Difference for Roma Children (INSCHOOL) is a joint project of the European Union and Council of Europe focusing on inclusive education policies and innovative education practices for all children, including Roma children. The INSCHOOL project ran between 2017 and 2024, in three cycles.

The pilot phase was implemented between May 2017 and July 2019 in five countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovak Republic, and the United Kingdom. The second cycle was implemented between October 2019 and June 2021 in Hungary, Romania, the Slovak Republic, and the Czech Republic. The objective of the final cycle was to support the design and implementation of

national inclusive education policies and innovative inclusive education practices in the Czech Republic, Portugal, Romania and the Slovak Republic, in line with European standards and principles for quality inclusive education. The INSCHOOL final conference aimed to take stock of the past seven years of the INSCHOOL project implementation, identify the main strengths and weaknesses, lessons learned and most significant changes/impacts that were achieved through project interventions and identify challenges and possible solutions.

“Today we will see whether we have made a difference in the last 7 years. The work that has been done in the last 7 years in this joint process has been challenging; we take up difficult topics, while remaining to be flexible and innovative in seeking solutions. Quality education, particularly, for Roma children, is a big priority for the Council of Europe and will continue to be so for years to come”.

Eleni Tsetsekou, Head of Division – Roma and Traveller Division within Anti-Discrimination Department of the Council of Europe, opening speech of the conference.



Opening speeches

The conference was opened by high-level representatives of both the Council of Europe and the European Commission, among them **the Head of Anti-Discrimination Department within Council of Europe, Hallvard Gorseth and the Head of Strategy and Investment Unit of the DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture within the European Commission Gyula Cserey**. The introductory remarks were moderated by the Head of the Roma and Traveller Division within Anti-Discrimination Department of the Council of Europe, Eleni Tsetsekou.



Hallvard Gorseth emphasized that INSCHOOL is an important project of the Council of Europe and the European Union, and that the partners share an understanding of the urgency to act in support of inclusive education and segregation policies. He thanked the counterparts in DG EAC on the longstanding cooperation dating since 2011 with ROMED 1 and ROMED 2 joint programmes, and the three cycles of INSCHOOL. The Council of Europe has developed to promote Roma history, culture, and Holocaust remembrance; for instance, the adoption of several recommendations by the Committee of Ministers, including the recommendation on Roma youth participation¹ and on the equality of Roma and Traveller women and girls². There are about 100 judgments related to Roma human rights issues, and some of them concern specifically access to education and desegregation, which has been paving the way for desegregation policies in countries concerned and beyond.

The Council of Europe will continue developing tools to promote Roma fundamental rights with potential recommendation on desegregation, and inclusive policies in schools. The Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) and its Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM) are working tirelessly on new standards and on the exchange of good practices. The members of ADI-ROM will shape the new Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Travellers 2026-

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/roma-youth-participation-cm-rec-2023-4-web/1680af2a36>

² [CM/Rec\(2024\)1](https://rm.coe.int/CM/Rec(2024)1) (coe.int)

2030, and desegregation and inclusive education will remain among the essential priorities of the Council of Europe's work on Roma and Traveller inclusion.

“A Vibrant civil society and a young population can only bring extraordinary benefits to our societies. INSCHOOL developed a solid methodology and know-how, serving as a foundation for more focused approaches to eliminating discrimination and fostering inclusion”.

Gyula Cserey shared that INSCHOOL journey was not only very interesting but also rewarding. He underlined the consistency during the past years, which, in his opinion, was more than a success story, as they managed to popularise this project. He stressed that the European Commission is very aware of the situation of the Roma people, and because this situation remains difficult, this is exactly the reason why European Commission policy reforms and investments are targeting Roma children and young people regarding access to education.

Mr Cserey shared the latest analysis of the education situation from last year, showing some drawbacks. One-quarter of children and youngsters have serious underperformance in reading, math, and science. They cannot perform simple math problems; he also shared that:

“One thinks Roma children cannot do as much as other children. I am afraid it is quite contrary”.

In the end, he expressed his enthusiasm that after the European elections, the European Commission will be able to continue the action under the EU Roma Strategic Framework, and Member States will rely on the EU funds for education and the inclusion of Roma people in general. This can only come from the hearts of experts who want to make a difference. The European Commission is proud to be able to support this work and is very confident that this work will continue.



THE QUALITY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION – FROM PRACTICE TO POLICY LEVEL

The first session on the quality inclusive education – from practice to policy level was opened by Marina Vasic, emphasizing the journey of INSCHOOL. She agreed with previous presenters that the journey of 7 years working in all INSCHOOL countries was quite challenging but valuable. She concluded by saying that:

“It might be the end of INSCHOOL as a project, but this does not mean that what we have learned in these several years and set the stones for will not flourish into something else”.

Then she gave floor to the speakers - **Mark Penfold, Former Teacher at Babington College, United Kingdom**, followed by a presentation by **Miroslav Klempar, INSCHOOL Educational Advisor, Czechia** and a presentation by **Jan Hero, Director, Department of Support for the Inclusion of Marginalised Groups, Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic**.

Penfold began by sharing the story of his first visit to segregated schools in Slovakia, his impressions at that time, and the progress made since. In 2018 with a group of teachers, he went to Slovakia to train INSCHOOL teachers in Poprad Tatry including for teachers and NGOs in Bratislava. One of the teachers who had attended these trainings met him shortly after the visit and expressed how

impressed she was. The teacher was able to learn about making the school’s lessons more inclusive. Next, Penfold explained the inclusion work at Babington and its positive impact on pupils. He pointed out that, after having studied in Babington, seven Roma children, who had arrived in Babington several years ago without any proficiency in English, now have studied and graduated from the UK universities. He shared that the purpose of the inclusion project was to improve education for Roma, but the teachers did not focus only on Roma; they had also included the whole school in the project. As a result, the attitude of majority of the children towards Roma children improved. Another key outcome of the project was that Roma children attendance reached 70 percent. He connected this positive result with learning about Roma children’s educational background:

“We teachers got a better understanding of where the Roma children had come from and educational journey they had before, which helped us address their needs”.

He also cited the successful example of Ondrej, one of his former Roma students, and INSCHOOL Inclusive Education Ambassador, who was required to go to the special school in Slovakia due to his Roma ethnicity. After arriving in Babington, he attended the college, earned a degree, and opened his own and thriving business. Penfold went on to share that when a Slovak State Secretary visited

Babington, he concluded by saying that he now has a model to take back to work. He also shared that during COVID, they worked with the Slovak Ministry via Zoom; and even though the process was stalled due to political changes, he believes there is potential for bringing about change at the national level. Penfold pointed out that after their success story, Babington worked as a role model to other 10 UK schools. As regards future actions in the inclusive education area, he went on to suggest:

“You don’t plant a tree and leave it. Find some bottom-up approaches. Support one or two schools in project countries to skill up their work in improving education outcomes for Roma pupils in inclusive settings. These schools should then be designated lead schools to share their practice”.

He concluded his presentation by highlighting the significance of Nil Desperandum for Roma children’s educational inclusion:

“Keep going. We must keep reminding everyone how important inclusion is. When Rosa Parks refused to move from a bus seat, did she think 50 years later a black president would sit in the same seat? Let’s keep going”.

Miroslav Klempar continued to share about the first impressions of the INSCHOOL project in Czechia. He stated that this idea was not well perceived at first, as many people, including him, thought this was one just another project. But later, when he learned more about the project and its activities, he committed himself to working on inclusion and stopped criticizing the schools for segregation policies; instead, they started cooperating with schools and advise on making them more inclusive. He shared his gratitude for the INSCHOOL project as it helped to change negative attitudes and brought a bottom-up approach to this field. He stated that the journey of the INSCHOOL was challenging as not all schools cooperated with them, and it did not bring many changes at the time. However, the main outcome of this project was changing the narrative on segregation, from questioning **whether** inclusion should happen **or not** to the question of **how** inclusion should happen. Klempar also highlighted the importance of local level and the ownership of the community over the process. He stressed that the current Czech government is more determined to fight the segregation of Roma children, and therefore, he believes this work has been and will be successful. He also stressed the need for comprehensive assessment for all schools, monitoring and evaluation, policy development, and advocacy, as well as relying on internal resources, cooperation with parents, strategic partnerships with stakeholders, flexibility, and sustainability. He concluded with the remark:

“Inclusion is a process that never ends. We have to work hard to achieve it”.

Jan Hero took the floor to highlight the key achievements of the INSCHOOL project in Slovakia. He began with an appreciation for study visits involving all implementing countries:

“It is only through this sharing of experience that we can learn from work that has already been done in other countries and share experience with each other”.

Among the impacts supported by INSCHOOL, Hero mentioned the adoption of the definition of segregation in the School Act, the adoption of the National Inclusive Education Strategy, the adoption of the methodological Manual on Desegregation in Education, and proposals for legislative intentions, reforms, and national projects.

“INSCHOOL has become a direct part of changes, that are taking place in Slovakia and moving education towards inclusiveness”.

He shared that INSCHOOL in Slovakia included eight schools from six localities, and their national projects were addressing the separate teaching of Roma and non-Roma children and the overrepresentation of Roma children in the special education system. He also stressed the challenges in the inclusion process. For instance, anti-Roma sentiments and discrimination, the desegregation process in the education system, and addressing the problem of school segregation.

“We need to combat prejudices that still prevail in society against Roma women and men, which also affect their opportunities in their academic sphere”.



THE INTERNATIONAL COMPONENT OF INSCHOOL – ADDED VALUE

The second session benefited from the testimonies of a state representative, an INSCHOOL expert and an Inclusive Education Ambassador, which focused on the added value that INSCHOOL had brought to their respective countries.

The series of testimonies was initiated by **Octavia Bors-Georgescu, advisor from the Ministry of Education, Romania**, who provided insights about desegregation policies in Romania and the knowledge gained through international study visits. Romania faces significant challenges in education, such as the dropout problem and segregation issues that mostly affect pupils who identify as Roma and those with specific educational needs. Particularly:

- 17% of pupils in one generation (2012-2019) **dropped out** of school before graduation from middle school in rural areas (Ministry of Education, 2023).
- There is a **three-level gap** in reading performance between the pupils with the highest and lowest economic, social, and cultural backgrounds (PISA, 2018).
- Segregation affects more than **half of Roma pupils** in Romania, with the phenomenon doubling in 2021 compared to 2016 (According to data from the Fundamental Rights Agency from 2022).

Bors-Georgescu went on to also share the adoption of the new law on education in 2023 in Romania and its impact. This law, which has a dedicated chapter to inclusive education, brought some changes:

- **Rural teachers** receive a non-taxable installation bonus equal to five gross minimum salaries.
- **National Centre for Inclusive Education:** more resources, coordination, and support for school counsellors and mediators, speech therapists, and support teachers. Support **desegregation**, monitor, and sanction segregation.
- +75% of the **standard cost** per student with SEN.
- Healthy **meals** and remedial education.

The international study visit to Lisbon was a chance to see how inclusion policies were implemented in schools, with support teachers as one of its pillars. She shared her appreciation for this system as she saw how cooperative these teachers were, who were always with pupils, helping them in their interactions with their peers. The experience in Portugal was shared in Romania, and based on it the duties of different specialists and support teachers were revised in order to make schools and classrooms more inclusive and empowering for teachers, pupils and parents.

Another lesson Romanian delegation learned from the Lisbon visit was to consider preventing segregation more seriously. She shared that before they were focused on monitoring and combating segregation, they did not focus on preventing segregation.

“During discussions, we understood, that we also have to think about prevention of segregation, going into the root cause”.

Lastly, she pointed out the creation of the new procedure for the distribution of students in the classrooms. Earlier, schools with mainly Roma students or non-Roma students were allowed. With this new mandatory procedure, schools are now obliged to distribute students to classrooms either alphabetically or by drawing lots, pre-grouping by age, gender, native language, and students with a history of repeating one or more school years. This rule applies to the first year of kindergarten, primary school, middle school, and high school in schools with more than one class per level.

Sheila Gonzalez Motos, INSCHOOL expert shared insights on Training Course on Education Policy Making Based on Inclusive Values and Data. During this training, which took place first in Budapest in 2023 and then online for 8 sessions between September 2023 and February 2024, the participants could learn through conceptual, data collection and experience sharing sessions. During conceptual sessions they focused on understanding concepts that help design better desegregation policies; For instance, concepts such as social justice and distributive justice, reproduction of inequalities, and human right approaches. During the training, they participants also focused on how to collect data and improve equality data systems, as well as reflecting on school segregation practices and legal tools in countering segregation and discrimination.

She stressed that the most important benefit of the training programme was peer-learning, because while learning from each other, the participants who are also directly involved design and implementation in inclusive education policies, identified that they had the same challenges but different approaches in each case, which was inspiring. She also shared about the positive feedback they received from the training participants. It includes new knowledge acquired, new tools, identifying initiatives in policy making, and learning from other countries’ experiences and promising practices.

Next, the floor was given to **Israel Paródia, INSCHOOL Inclusive Education Ambassador**, who shared his inspiring personal story and how he became part of the Inclusive Education Ambassador initiative. Israel is a young Roma from Portugal who studies medicine. He recalled his school experience: where he did not have any books, but his teacher made photocopies of exercises for him, and she gave him books to read. After some years, Israel changed his attitude towards the school—school was not associated with only having fun anymore but also something greater:

“I started to see school as a door to my dreams and later, as a door to the world, to see the world differently”.

After some time, he managed to be one of the best students at the university. Then he realized that he could also make a difference in other ways, not just through medicine, so he decided to encourage and empower other Roma and non-Roma children:

“I have to show Roma and non-Roma children that if I could achieve this, they can also achieve that, so I started using my voice”.

Israel recalled that in the beginning, this journey was difficult due to hate speech and mixed feelings about his identities (being a Roma, a Portuguese, and a medical student), but gradually he started talking about his experience publicly and being invited to various international and local institutions to share about the importance of inclusive education. He became involved in Roma Role Models which focuses on showing positive examples of successful Roma and motivating Roma students to continue education. He shared his personal experience with Roma children.



“When we started Roma Role Models, I saw kids crying and coming to me, saying their dream was to pursue school, just to make it to the 6th grade, 7th or 8th grade, as you see their dreams were not that big”.

Israel concluded his presentation with words:

“Policy making is very good, as we can bring change to millions of children. I chose medicine because I want to heal people, but the main healing comes from politics, and the main ingredient for that is humanity in our hearts”.

Discussion Conclusions

During the discussions, the participants mainly stressed the root cause of segregation, institutional racism, and multilayered approach to desegregation. For instance, it was frequently stated, that behind the real cause for segregated education for Roma children often lies social and educational system itself: systemic racism in schools, and therefore, there is a necessity of examining how each state's system needs to be directly inclusive. The fact that educational measures alone cannot address the issue of school segregation was another important point. To promote inclusive education for children, however, the participation of various social groups—including the community, stakeholders, social workers is required in addition to the housing policies. It was also concluded that putting Roma children and children with special educational needs (SEN) in one box requires a careful consideration. Lastly, participants suggested shifting the debate to look at education as a basic right for Roma children.



THE EDUCATIONAL DESEGREGATION MEASURES ACROSS EUROPE

Jarmila Lajkacova, INSCHOOL expert, moderated the session, which brought together other INSCHOOL experts - Xavier Bonal Sarro and Boyan Zahariev.



Sarro presented the **Mapping Study: Trends and Pathways Towards Educational Inclusion**, focusing on Chapter 5 on school segregation-tackling policies. While the existence of normative frameworks in this subject is beneficial and necessary, and they are far more developed than policies, they are still insufficient because certain policies deviate from the norms. He emphasised the importance of a systemic approach (including inequalities beyond school

segregation), an intersectoral approach (but not the space for education policies), comprehending the context of segregation, and evaluating desegregation policies.

“We should also understand that even if we reduce school segregation, we still have inequalities to address”.

Sarro discussed some of the seven policy domains of the Mapping study. One of the policy domains is planning school supply, which is important for ensuring quality at each school district, reducing the number of students per classroom to favour equal distribution of disadvantaged students among schools. As an example, of planning school supply, he mentioned two promising practices: in order to address the segregation of Roma children, the city of Hódmezővásárhely, Hungary, closed ten out of eleven primary schools and opened five new ones. Another example is planning school supplies and merging of adjacent catchment areas in Paris, which is a new method for assigning students to public schools as of 2017. Two of the three catchment areas have achieved their social diversity objective with a clear decrease in students enrolling in private schools.

He also brought into the discussion the compensatory policies. As an example, allocating the best teachers (based on National Board Certification) to schools with high proportion of students from vulnerable environments was mentioned. This practice has been implemented in a number of US states and has demonstrated a

positive effect, particularly for low-income and minority students, as evidenced by improvements in average performance and graduation rates.

In addition, Sarro presented the Bulgarian Vidin case as an illustration of community work strategies – a project of bussing children between school districts where activists played a crucial role in getting support from Bulgarian opinion makers and intellectuals, but also Romani parents. This experiment demonstrated that in order to help them overcome their fears and hesitations, parental participation and candid conversation were essential. Observers argued that this process helped to overcome the myth that Roma parents would not allow their children to attend integrated school because of the fear of harassment, a lack of educational aspirations or childrens inability to meet higher academic standards.



Boyan Zahariev, INSCHOOL expert, presented the Feasibility Study on Busing as a Desegregation Measure in Education in the Slovak Republic.

The aim of the study was to gather information on localities/cases where bussing was an appropriate desegregation tool and had the potential to improve the educational conditions of Roma children and their inclusion. The focus is on primary schools attended by children from Roma communities, where transfer to other schools can offer an improvement in the quality of the educational process as well as intercultural encounters. Despite the fact that the “Busing Study” covers in detail the Slovak Context, the Study is relevant for any context where bussing initiatives are being considered. Importantly, it covers the necessary support measures (soft measures) which must accompany bussing initiatives.

A busing programme, that addresses the school segregation issue is as much about the distribution of resources: transport, logistics, travel distances, travel times, as about socioeconomic, ethnic and other forms of segregation and tracking of students within the education system, distribution of resources within the school system, housing including informal housing, segregated settlements, the way teaching and learning happen within the education system, stereotypes and attitudes, institutional set-up and policy framework. The conclusion for this mapping study was that socioeconomic



disadvantage overlaps with ethnicity in Slovakia and typical Slovak schools have a few disadvantaged students. Zahariev also shared that schools with lots of disadvantaged students usually have much lower test scores, thus socioeconomic segregation affects the performance of students.

He also brought into discussion the *white flight phenomenon* - to an existing class of 20 students not more than a few new students might be safely added, not to provoke social distancing and triggering “*white flight*”; within quite a few locations, it would not be possible to move a significant number of students from the potential sending schools while keeping this guideline, unless students travel further than is considered acceptable or advisable for their age, or unless a programme finds a way around this by using methods that can change attitudes and ways of teaching and learning.

Discussion Conclusions

Concerns regarding the busing approach were voiced during the discussion. For example, it was stressed that desegregation policies in the US have partly failed after 70 years, and that segregation is worse now. This could be an indication that desegregation does not occur in a vacuum and that robust and long-term support measures are crucial.

THE ENABLING FACTORS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION OF

Hristina Petkova INSCHOOL Project Contact Point and Equality Coordinator at DG Education, Youth, Sports and Culture of the European Commission provided insights into INSCHOOL contribution to quality inclusive education and moderated this final session devoted to the enabling factors for the educational inclusion of vulnerable groups, including Roma.



VULNERABLE GROUPS, INCLUDING ROMA

Marcela Adamova, from Non-Discrimination: Anti-Racism and Roma Coordination, DG Justice and Consumers, European Commission, shared her insights on the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation and the EU instruments supporting its implementation.

The European Commission has addressed the segregation issue through EU funding and comprehensive legal tools, for instance the main tool is the EU Roma Strategic Framework for quality, Inclusion and Participation for 2020 – 2030, adopted in October 2020, which was later accompanied by the Council recommendation³. This Framework sets out comprehensive three-pillar approach, which is about equality for all (including Roma), socioeconomic inclusion of Roma, and participation of Roma in all spheres of lives. The Framework included four sectoral objectives (including the area of education), and three horizontal objectives, concerning fighting against antigypsyism, poverty, and enhancing Roma participation in decision-making. Each of these objectives are linked to targets to be reached by 2030; for instance, the objective of **Increasing effective equal access to quality inclusive mainstream education**⁴, has as its targets:

³ [EUR-Lex - 32021H0319\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ [The new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation \(full package\) - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#) p.5.

- Cutting gap in participation in early childhood education and care by at least half
- Reducing gap in upper secondary completion secondary completion by at least one third
- Working towards eliminating segregation by cutting at least in half the proportion of Roma children attending segregated primary schools attending segregated primary schools (more relevant for Member States with significant Roma population).

Based on the Framework and the Council recommendation, the Member States committed themselves to prevent any form of segregation in education and promote equity. In these two documents, the Member States shared their national Roma strategies and set of measures in first half of 2021 and 2022, after which the Commission published the assessment report in January 2023; the conclusions from this report are as follows:

- All Member States with big Roma populations have developed measures to prevent segregation, but in some cases, proposed measures were not accompanied by indicators and targets, which is insufficient; National strategic frameworks do not adequately address the issues of participation of Roma children, for instance, in kindergartens.

The Member States were called to step up their efforts, regarding eradication of school and housing segregation, because they are

interlinked - it prevents Roma children in participation in preschool education. Therefore, the Member States are also strongly encouraged to make full use of the EU Roma Strategic Framework; also, EU funding to full extent to work towards EU objectives and targets. In this process, the European Commission provides guidance to the Member States, particularly through National Roma Contact Points and the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union, which provides data collection.



Andrey Ivanov, Head of Roma Inclusion Sector, Equality, Roma and Social Rights Unit, EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) presented the current trends and data on educational inclusion of Roma.

Not only does FRA collect the data and evidence, but it also analyses these and provides an instrument for activists and academics to achieve change. The purpose of the FRA data is to find areas for improvement and, if there is no improvement, find the reasons behind it. Based on the EU Roma Strategic Framework, which is the first document that offered objectives and targets, the gap between the general population and the Roma population in upper secondary

school completion must be reduced at least by one third⁵. However, the situation shows that even if there is a slight improvement between data in 2016 and 2021, the progress is not even near this target. Hungary has one of the better conditions, yet even in this case there is a 45 percent disparity in the percentages. In terms of segregation in schools (where most of the pupils are Roma in



He also brought into the discussion the way of detecting segregation – identifying ethnic Roma students. Self-identification is preferable way of identifying somebody’s ethnicity; for that it is necessary:

⁵ [The new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation \(full package\) - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#) P.5.

classrooms), the FRA statistics revealed that segregation has not decreased in most cases, even after five years of work. A few exceptions are Hungary, where it went down from 60 percent to 44 percent; Italy has a low segregation percentage of 7 percent; and Portugal has a segregation percentage of 2 percent.

Ivanov also discussed the factors contributing to the situation of Roma children in education. He interlinked poverty and residential segregation with educational issues, showing that the reason in most cases why Roma children don’t attend early childhood, or primary education and care is due to their poverty and segregated households. He stressed that addressing residential segregation will increase the chances of solving segregated education issues. He also emphasised that we should not look at single dimensions in a situation, as the picture is more complex, meaning that there are lots of other factors contributing to the picture we have today. He concluded with a positive note that when improvements are made in one single sphere of life (which could be education, living conditions, etc.), they have implications across all areas of life.

- to outreach to target population to overcome mistrust and have more realistic numbers.
- parental meetings as only parents can make this on behalf of underaged pupils,
- support by local organizations from target population,

- support by respected individuals in local population.

Third party identification is acceptable only if this method is vetted by broad stakeholders, and it should not be done by interested parties, such as school principals.

Otilia Ciobanu, from Inclusive Growth, Urban and Territorial Development, DG Regional and Urban policy, European Commission, shared about the European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF) and its capacity. ERDF policy objective 4 is related to the inclusive education: **Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and online education and training.** Among the measures the ERDF can provide are building educational capacities; equipment to respond to different needs of children, including children with disabilities; bussing – access to mainstream schools, also provision for digital education (internet, laptops, etc).

According to the Common Provisions Regulations (CPR), the funds should not support actions that contribute **to any form of segregation or exclusion.** Additionally, the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund **should promote the socioeconomic inclusion of marginalised communities.** The needs of Roma communities can also be addressed through territorial instruments, which provide for the possibility of designing place-sensitive responses to local challenges with strong involvement of local actors.

In conclusion: Measures are designed as a result of the outcomes of mapping of infrastructure and service needs, as well as mapping of segregated educational facilities; housing stocks and neighbourhoods at all territorial levels, including at the micro-regional level; direct involvement of all relevant stakeholders,



including representatives of the communities, in all stages of the design and implementation of the measures; facilitation of public debate at local, regional, and national levels in order to involve all stakeholders in the dialogue. She went on to suggest that it is necessary to have specific segregation targets both in education and housing, as well as regular monitoring of the levels of segregation.

Ivana Jankovska, Programme Manager, Slovakia, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission

Some of the ESF+ targeted measures are: development of the competences of teachers and other staff and improvement of their working conditions; development of curricula for combating stereotypes and discrimination; individualised support programmes for disadvantaged students, also when transferred from segregated to mainstream settings; programmes encouraging effective parental involvement in education and fostering links between the schools and early childhood education and care facilities and local communities; and measures to support the improvement of IT skills for disadvantaged children, teachers, and parents from marginalised communities. From mainstream measures like support for digital literacy and access to vocational education and training, measures preventing early school leaving have been highlighted. Jankovska gave the example of Slovakia and how ERDF and ESF+ supported tackling educational segregation in Slovakia: 900 million euros have been spent for marginalised Roma communities, out of which 355 million was allocated to improve access to education, employment, and social inclusion. There are also other projects planned or under implementation, such as a call for Roma and non-Roma NGOs; support for Helping Professions 3 (POP 3); systemic support for mental health and prevention of children, pupils, and students through the counselling and prevention system; and a scholarship programme for pupils and students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. She discussed the national project "Opportunities for All", which aims to result in 15 pilot local desegregation projects. These localities will also receive funding to implement their projects

practically. The project also aims to increase the local school employee's knowledge of segregation and produce a nation-wide guideline for the preparation of local desegregation projects.



Helena Fonseca, Deputy Chief inspector, Inspectorate for Education and Science, Portugal, closed this panel with her presentation about the role of the Portuguese Inspectorate fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools. She shared that there is a big progress if we look at the school dropout rates in Portugal between 2002 and 2021- from 40 percent to 5,9. Regarding the current dropout rate of Roma pupils, the 2023 report says that 1928 students from Roma communities dropped out of school in the 2020/2021 school year,

representing 12,8 percent of the total numbers of pupils enrolled in the same school year. She also highlighted that Portugal has a holistic vision and comprehensive and integrated policies aiming at educational inclusion. For instance, these policies include a legal framework for inclusive education, pedagogical assessment, curriculum guidelines for pre-school education, and a national strategy for citizenship. These policies could be summed up as diversity for all, equity for all, and inclusion for all, having principles such as personalisation, flexibility, self-determination, and parental involvement. As for the Portuguese inspectorate's involvement in this process, they are involved in monitoring (regular observation of educational activities), control (compliance with the law—organisation of the year), audit, evaluation, ombudsmanship, and international activities. The Portuguese inspectorate also considers the heterogeneity in class composition; the 2021-2022 research showed, that 53.3% of the schools did not respect the heterogeneity of students from 7th to 9th grade, considering their belonging to Roma communities. Another instrument from the inspectorate is the external evaluation of schools, observing if they have diverse strategies to adequately respond to different students and groups; if students characteristics and pace are considered; and if content/themes approached by linking them to students' daily lives and cultural and geographical environments.



CONCLUSIONS AND CLOSING REMARKS

The conference highlighted several crucial messages, emphasised by many participants. First of all, sharing experience with each other has a high importance as it can inspire to develop better policies; even sharing failures and challenges in policymaking and implementation serves a good purpose because we can still learn a lot from our mistakes. Secondly, there is a will from the European Union and the Council of Europe to put all their institutional capacities to good use, and it is crucial how the Member States will use all the funding and expertise available to provide inclusive education for Roma children. Another significant point is that inclusive education for Roma children could not be achieved without cooperation. The



involvement of diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society, and Roma and non-Roma parents, teachers, and social workers, can result in real progress in this field.

The highlight from sharing good practices was that Roma children can learn as much as others, improve their academic performance, receive the highest grades, and become successful people. The main reason we do not have this picture lies in their socioeconomic situation, discrimination and institutional racism. That is why desegregation policies should be linked to tackling housing, economic, and systemic segregation as well, which affects the area of education.

It was concluded that the INSCHOOL project has left a good foundation and heritage for eliminating segregation in education, and this experience could be used by various schools in Europe, but one should not forget that inclusion work will bear fruit only if we show persistency.



Open Grid
A network of digital energy providers, aggregators and consumers, all connected to the grid.

12 Ambassadors

8 Countries

Digital energy ecosystems and governance platform designed to the benefit of all its users.

UKRI
K2

THE
LONDON
INSTITUTE

DR
ROSE
GEORGIADIS

DR
SARAH
WATSON



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