



## ECRI webinar on inclusive education in times of Covid-19

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I am Veronika Poklembová, an ambassador of the Teach for Slovakia program whose mission is building a community of leaders in education and part of the global Teach for All network. I am currently the Director of ETP Slovakia, an NGO based in Košice, Eastern Slovakia, which has been active for twenty years, mostly in this region – currently operating 4 community centres. ETP's mission is to open mainstream opportunities for the Roma through our programs. In the communities where we have had the chance to work long term we have supported hundreds of Roma to increase their chances for a better life.

In this presentation I would like to share our experience, and also include other examples from Slovakia implemented by our partners

According to the Institute of Educational Policy between 23 000 to 32000 (5-7%) primary school children may be without an Internet connection [1]. Children from poor households also have significantly lower access to the technology needed for online distance learning. They can hardly count on the support of their family members during home-schooling because their parents are lacking education themselves. Another issue is that crisis has brought intense pressure on poor families to provide just for their everyday needs. Teachers from Teach for Slovakia estimate that pupils from families living in poverty will only learn a tenth of what they would learn in school [2]. This is a new situation for principals and teachers, where coordination at local and higher levels and extra methodological support is crucial.

### ETPs experience:

Among other activities in our 4 community centres, we provide informal after-school education, tutoring and mentoring support.

When schools were closed in mid-March we paused our activities too. We strengthened contact with our families via phone and social media and if needed we lent our children phones or tablets. Around Easter time we partially restarted our activities - providing individual tutoring and our program for small groups (as you can see on the pictures). Our mentors and clients were involved in sewing face masks. Secondary school children were involved in the preparation of educational leaflets on COVID. Our colleagues were helping the children with online learning. Continuous contact and motivation have been crucial in helping our families to cope with this stressful situation. It has been more difficult to support the younger children (up to 10 yrs) – who are not used to digital means of communication or work at home on their own.

Mentoring (both local and online) has proved crucial in these times of distance learning. Mentees (mostly children aged 12+) and their families benefited from the existing relationships with their mentors. Mentors were in contact individually, in person or via phone or social media. Our colleagues in the community centres were facilitating communication when there were any problems. Often the home environment of our children is not well suited

to offer privacy for the calls – a busy environment of extended families living together in small apartments. That is why we have provided a safe space for mentoring calls in the community centres

#### More examples from Slovakia:

1. „Every child matters“ project – Teach for Slovakia and the Comenius Institute, in cooperation with companies and sponsors, provided second-hand smartphones with educational software and disinfection to selected students from Teach for Slovakia partner schools to help them with online learning. 40 children took part in the pilot phase [3]
2. Another example is using TV as a platform for education – state television prepared a special programme for Roma children „Tumenca khere“ (transl. With you at home) once a week in Slovak and Roma language, focused on the younger primary school kids [4]
3. Online platform for principals, teachers on distance learning [www.ucimenadialku.sk](http://www.ucimenadialku.sk) – offered resources, useful information on COVID-19 measures and webinars etc.. This is also available in Roma and Hungarian languages and is overseen by the Ministry of Education and the State Pedagogical Institute

#### What we see as the possible next steps and need for improvements:

- The Ministry of Education and the State pedagogical institute are encouraging schools to work in partnerships with local NGOs and other actors in order to prepare and provide summer schools as a compensation of the limited access to education for children from poor communities

In ETP we prepare summer activities every year. This year our summer academy in August will be in each of the localities where we work and will put more emphasis on so-called Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment method. These are activities based on the principles of developmental and cognitive psychology and special pedagogy.

- We all need to get ready for a second COVID wave and future challenges. We need to further explore and scale-up new forms of online learning with sufficient support and guidance for children, families and teachers, explore opportunities for individual tutoring at schools or outdoor (for „offline children“) for visits at home, teaching in cooperation with community centres and mentors, teaching via the post or TV etc. The exchange of ideas and practice is essential and so is cooperation of schools with local NGOs and social workers etc.[5]

- The education of children from segregated communities is, unfortunately, only a small part of a much bigger problem – while securing the better conditions for children's learning, we also need to consider other needs of those children and their families living in poverty. The most important approach is a holistic one. We desperately need to improve living conditions in poor communities. We have seen that existential problems in families prevent their children from studying. Only children who live in decent homes, who have enough and nutritious food and who are protected from toxic stress are capable of learning.

**Therefore the task for all of us is to ensure that every child can live in conditions that enable them to gain new knowledge that is so important for a successful future.**

Sources:

[1] <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/16113.pdf>

[2] <https://teachforslovakia.sk/2020/04/28/na-kazdom-dietati-zalezi/>

[3] <https://teachforslovakia.sk/2020/04/28/na-kazdom-dietati-zalezi/>

[4] <https://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/archiv/15830>

[5] <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/16113.pdf>; <https://teachforslovakia.sk/2020/04/08/chudobne-deti-odstihnite-od-internetu/>; <https://dennikn.sk/1944752/ako-dobehnut-ucivo-zmeskane-pocas-korony-skoly-dostanu-moznost-prejst-na-novy-pruzny-system-vyucby/>; <https://dennikn.sk/blog/1886644/aky-je-rozdiel-medzi-chudobnymi-romskymi-online-a-offline-ziakmi-a-ziackmi-a-coho-sa-najviac-obavaju-po-navrate-do-skoly/>; <https://dennikn.sk/blog/1851943/ako-zostat-blizko-na-dialku/>