



## Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

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### SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIONS FOR THE EARLY EDUCATION OF THE ROMA AND SINTI

Contributions from European Research  
Working Session 14 and 15



**INCLUD-ED:**  
**Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion  
in Europe from Education**

An Integrated Project of the VI Framework Programme of  
the European Commission

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**INCLUD-ED is an integrated project under priority 7 “Citizens and governance in the knowledge-based society” of the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP6). Under this Programme, INCLUD-ED is the research project focused on school education, covering early education, with the largest amount of resources and of the greatest scientific status of those financed by the European Union’s Research Framework Programmes. This Integrated Project focuses on the analysis of educational strategies that contribute to overcoming inequalities and promote social cohesion, and educational strategies that generate social exclusion, particularly focusing on vulnerable and marginalised groups, being one of them the Roma minority. Thus, it aims to identify key elements and create action lines to improve educational and social policy.**

#### **AREAS OF RESEARCH**

The European Union faces the challenge of creating high quality educational systems and social policies that are more effective and equitable. Along these lines, INCLUD-ED, the most significant research endeavour financed by FP6 and focused on compulsory education, special education and vocational training, has focused on the attention on the following areas of research:

- Examining the interaction between **educational systems, agents and policies**, in compulsory education, vocational training and special education.
- Studying the way in which educational exclusion is connected to these four **areas of society**: employment, housing, health and political participation.
- Particularly focusing on five **vulnerable groups** throughout the project: migrants, youth, people with disabilities and women.
- Analysing the mixed interventions between **educational policy** and other areas of **social policy**, and identifying which strategies overcome social exclusion and which build social cohesion in Europe.
- Studying the **communities** involved in learning projects which have achieved the integration of social and educational interventions which promote social inclusion and empowerment.

## SCIENTIFIC APPROACH/ METHODOLOGY

The INCLUD-ED project, through the **critical communicative research perspective**, aims to have a significant **social and political impact** on European educational and social systems, as was previously achieved in other FP projects (e.g. Workaló, FP5). The Critical Communicative Methodology consists of:

**Knowledge constructed through Intersubjective dialogue.** The researchers bring their expertise and the recent developments in the scientific community into the dialogue, and this is contrasted with what social actors think and experience in their everyday lives.

**Including traditionally silenced voices.** The direct and active participation of the people whose reality is studied throughout the entire research process.

**Exclusionary and Transformative Components.** Scientific analysis oriented towards identifying strategies that lead to social inclusion (transformative) and those which lead to social exclusion (exclusionary).

## WHICH ARE THE EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES WHICH HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN OVERCOMING INEQUALITIES AFFECTING ROMA AND SINTI STUDENTS?

This document is oriented towards addressing some of the greater challenges in dealing with Roma and Sinti education. These recommendations are based on the INCLUD-ED results. Special attention is also paid to ways to access and participate in high quality early education, which has the potential to lead to a breakthrough in the situation of Roma and Sinti in the long run.

**Successful educational strategies related to the organisation of students and to the use of available resources to fight back any kind of segregation (in separate or within schools)**

Vulnerable groups are more likely to be assigned to low achieving groups, with the consequent impact on the lack of opportunities for these students to participate in further education. International literature contributions outline the fact that some educational actions, such as streaming or mixture, diminish learning opportunities for low achievers or disadvantaged students. Streaming, for example, consists of “tailoring the curriculum to different groups of children based on ability within one school” (European Commission, 2006: 19). In general, streaming does not increase, or even reduce, the overall performance of students in schools in which it is implemented; in fact it increases the gap between the different levels of student attainment. On the other hand, mixture (heterogeneous traditional classrooms) is the phenomenon that occurs when schools continue to use the traditional classrooms approach developed during the industrial era, and thus fail to respond to today’s diversity amongst students in Europe’s knowledge society.

The diversity of students raises new challenges for teachers with regards to responding to students’ different needs. Traditional classrooms (mixture), which contain students of the same age with only one teacher per class, have demonstrated that they do not respond to the diversity in terms of characteristics, level of achievement and learning paces that usually exist in the classroom. Simply educating students with different abilities together (mixture) does not guarantee an efficient response to the diversity of the students. Streaming practices are characterised by allocating extra resources (e.g. support teachers) to help those students with more difficulties, but this is accompanied by ability grouping or by different placements. On the other hand, **some inclusive actions consist of introducing the same resources that are used for segregated educational practices (in separate or at the same school) aimed at students with more difficulties into the regular classroom in order to educate all of the students together.**

#### **Specific strategies related to the organisation of students and to the use of available resources in Early Education:**

- **Multi-cultural heterogeneous (or Culturally diverse groups) in early education with additional resources (support staff):** diverse students (children with special needs, with an immigrant background or who belong to minority groups) are included into all the classrooms. By using heterogeneous grouping, teachers aim to include diverse students into the same class. Research findings provide evidence of the way heterogeneous ability classrooms with additional resources improve student learning, especially for disadvantaged groups. Autochthonous teachers and family members as well as immigrant and cultural minority families state that students can learn more when they have more opportunities to work together. Heterogeneous grouping of immigrant and cultural minority students along with autochthonous students contributes to overcoming stereotypes, breaks away **from cultural segregation** and improves instrumental learning for all.

**Example:** In **Interactive Groups** students with different educational levels work in small heterogeneous groups, which rely on the participation of more adults, one to each group (these are student volunteers, people from neighbourhood associations, other education professionals, and family members).

This process enriches the student’s interaction, accelerates their learning process and promotes solidarity amongst children during learning activities in which the most disadvantaged students are helped by their classmates and vice versa. Emphasis is placed on the instrumental areas of language and mathematics, especially on the acquisition of language at the first educational

stage (0-3 years old) and learning to read and write at the second stage (3-6 years old).

- **Special support staff within the classrooms:** special needs teachers and school assistants work together with ordinary teachers in the same classrooms.
- **Cooperation between students in early education and students from more advanced levels:** Students in early education interact with students of different ages. Pupils learn from each other and along with others, in different learning situations.
- **The introduction of instrumental learning from the first stage of pre-primary education (0-3 years):** It has been demonstrated that carrying out instrumental learning activities (reading, English, and ICT using the Microsoft Tablet PC Programme) increases children's strategies and skills. This practice contributes to the success of the students at subsequent stages, since pre-school education has a significant impact on children's development.
- Participation of immigrant and Roma families involves **including other cultures into instrumental learning activities**. This inclusion does not substitute the mainstream learning. It adds not subtracts opportunities.
- **High expectations** of the role of early education in order to guarantee equal opportunities for every student.

**Example:** A high standard curriculum for every child.

- **Close monitoring of the children's development.**

**Example:** Creating individual **learning plans** for all the children along with their parents. The individual learning plan is a tool to monitor children's development.

### Successful educational strategies related to Community participation.

Considering the evidence that the participation of families and community members becomes a significant potential resource for the enhancement of educational and social inclusion and further participation, different approaches, certificates and opportunities were identified. It is worth highlighting **the significance of family education as a strategy to improve the educational outcomes of the children**. Various educational practices throughout Europe have demonstrated different forms of **community participation** (involving teachers, students, family members, volunteers and the whole community in general) in school activities, which range from lesser to greater levels of involvement.

**Educational participation** is the highest level of participation which consists of the **intervention of community members and families in students' learning activities**. Community members participate directly in the classroom or in other educational spaces which are created in the school. **Interactive Groups**, for example, involve adults (family members and/or volunteers) in instrumental learning in classroom activities and promote a greater number of interactions which improve the learning processes for everyone. These adults become positive role models in the students' social groups inside the school.

In addition to the fact that the importance of **teacher training** which is based on research on effective practices is highlighted, **family education is pointed out as being an inclusive**

**strategy.** This strategy helps to improve the academic background of these families, especially in the case of those with a low socio-economic status or low educational levels. This has an influence on the children's learning context, thus helping to improve their performance.

#### **Specific Actions related to community participation in Early Education:**

- **Assisting with Student Evaluation:** Intensive cooperation between families and teachers in **evaluating the learning process** of pre-students and in **monitoring** student development.
- **Families intervening in students' learning activities, including Roma and Sinti families** (regular school activities and after-school activities, which are forms of community participation which have an impact on the learning processes of children).
- **Family education**, which responds to the educational needs and demands of families, for family members who belong to vulnerable groups also. **Example:** Dialogic Literary Gatherings.
- Schools **open for more hours and on more days with more support from the community** in order to carry out activities **linked to instrumental learning.** **Example:** Tutored Library and Tutored Digital Classrooms.
- Cooperation **with other professionals** to support children's needs, such as special needs teachers, and language assistants etc.
- **The participation of families in significant decision-making, accountability processes and in student learning processes, which has a positive impact** on increasing **the quality of education** (the generation of new knowledge for students) and on **promoting more family participation.** **Example:** The Learning Communities project.
- **The inclusion of minority students and their families into the school, helps to overcome cultural segregation.** This participation of families belonging to other cultures promotes the same opportunities to participate in decision-making processes for all of the families in the school.

## Further reading

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