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Responsible management and challenges of inclusion in multicultural school environment in Slovenia

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Abstract

Education is a vital part of any social cohesion agenda because educational outcomes affect all dimensions of the social cohesion triangle (social inclusion – social capital – social mobility). In this paper, we are focusing on the integration of Roma and migrant children in schools and the activation of youth to help as volunteers. Although diversity is an opportunity to make schools more inclusive, creative and open-minded, inequality in education is highest among Roma and migrant children. Europe needs more efficient, but at the same time more inclusive and equitable education systems. In this respect, responsible school management has a key role in adapting learning environment to the specific mix of students and making it more inclusive.

In the research part, we provide an evaluation of the seminars delivered in Slovenia (RoMigSc project). Almost three fourths of the respondents reported previous experience with specific methods of integrating Roma and migrant children into the learning environment. Most of the participants were teachers, school counsellors, social workers, public administrators and civil society activists /volunteers. Nearly half of them include volunteers in their activities. For the participants, the most valuable element of the seminars was the exchange of experience. They learned lessons which they liked the most, related to building social network with the inclusion of different levels of society and transfer of experience. As major suggestions for improvements of seminars, the participants listed more case studies and discussions.

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1. Introduction – responsible management: from inclusion to social cohesion

Inclusive education concept is only one dimension of a rights-based quality education, which emphasizes equity in access and participation, and responds positively to the individual learning needs and competencies of all children. Inclusive education is child-centered and places the responsibility of adaptation on the education system rather than the individual child. Together with other sectors and the wider community, it actively works to ensure that every child, irrespective of gender, language, ability, religion, nationality or other characteristics, is supported to meaningfully participate and learn alongside his/her peers, and develop to his/her full potential (Els, 2016; Mmball et al, 2015).

The concept of integration goes beyond “inclusion”, but is not just bringing people together in order to include minority in a community. According to Spencer (2003) integration is not simply about access to the education, labor market and other services, or about changing attitudes of minority population; it is a two-way process of adaptation by minority on one hand and larger population or host society on the other at all of those levels. We can talk about social cohesion and cohesive society that (OECD, 2011) “works toward the well being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility (rising from a lower to a higher social class or status).” In the last decade, the issue of intergeneration cooperation is discussed in terms to contribute to wellbeing of youth and elderly people (Goriup and Šoba, 2014).

While the notion of “social cohesion” is often used with different meanings, its constituent elements remain the same, which include concerns about (OECD, 2011), see Figure 1:

- **Social inclusion:** process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society. It aims to empower poor and marginalized people to take advantage of rising global opportunities.
- **Social capital:** the resources that result from people cooperating toward common ends.
- **Social mobility:** the ability of individuals or groups to move upward or downward in status based on wealth, occupation, education, or other social variables.



Fig. 1. Dimensions of the social cohesion triangle (social inclusion – social capital – social mobility).

Source: OECD (2011)

Education is a vital part of any social cohesion agenda because educational outcomes affect all three dimensions of the social cohesion triangle. When opportunities for quality education are possible across the population, schooling becomes a strong leveler of opportunities, bringing prospects for upward mobility even to disadvantaged groups. Increasing educational attainment is an important way for converging countries to reduce inequality in market incomes in the end, particularly as returns to education change because of shifting wealth.

Siebens et al (2014) discuss the position of school leaders, they have to adapt to what could be called the ‘ethical Panopticon’ of society and media. At the same time, school leaders have to be aware of stakeholders and the demands and needs of these stakeholders. The aim in schools nowadays is to become a ‘broad school.’ This way

schools express their will to create active and constructive links between the school and its environment, such as neighbourhood, environment, and youth work. When schools adopt social responsibility they aim for good communication and a positive relationship with the neighbourhood and therefore they establish and nurture a good reputation. The policymaking competence of schools – and their principals – is the most powerful concept about school management. It may be defined as a condition with a lot of internal tuning, coordination and constant adjusting – although so far a clear definition does not exist. Policymaking competence implies openness towards the dynamic world outside the school, with its ever-changing expectations, needs and interests. Therefore, this notion aims for a continuous process of change, focusing on the quality of educational processes.

In this paper, we are focusing on integration of Roma and migrant children in schools and activation of youth to help as volunteers. Inequality in education is the highest among Roma and migrant children. Migrant and Roma children often face discrimination and xenophobia, and educational achievements of these groups are in general poorer in comparison to their peers who are nationals of the countries in question. These trends have grave consequences, as academic underachievement and early dropout are significant causes of unemployment and failure to integrate into the society, and lead to problems of social marginalisation and poverty. In this regard, Europe needs more efficient, but at the same time more inclusive and equitable, education systems, which will give access to quality educational provision. To reach this aim of many projects already carried out at national and international level. Brejc and Koren (2014) discuss the top-down and bottom-up approach to quality in schools and stress that reflective self-evaluation has many times greater impact on school improvements than external evaluation.

The main aim of the RoMigSc project (2017), titled Inclusion of Roma and Migrants in Schools: Trainings, Open Discussions and Youth Volunteering Activities, is to support a better integration of Roma and migrant children in education. Various activities will be implemented in the partners' countries (Slovenia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Turkey, FYR of Macedonia): initial study, training for volunteers and volunteering activity – projects for schools, training for teachers, E-platform on inclusion in schools and intercultural topics, national seminars for different stakeholders, international conference. Through those activities we will stimulate innovative policy development, policy dialogue and implementation, as well as the exchange of knowledge in the fields of education, training and youth. The engagement of youth in volunteering is also fostered in the project. Volunteering plays a significant role in youth's social inclusion. It allows youngsters to engage as citizens, as well as to gain experience, which can enhance their employment opportunities (Bezjak and Klemenčič, 2014). Target groups in the project are: migrant and Roma children and their parents; teachers in schools with Roma and migrant children; Roma school assistants; volunteers (students); stakeholders such as policy-makers in the area of education, representatives from local authorities, volunteering organizations, directors of schools at different levels, academics and researchers in the area, etc.

2. Inclusive education for Roma and migrants children – good practices and interventions

The inclusive education aims at the education of all the children according to their age, in compliance with their capacities, and their special needs in the common school settings. Inclusive education represents improvement of schooling in many levels for all the children, and it is related to the promotion of dignity and differences (Zabeli and Behluli 2014, p. 6). There are number of good practices and proposed interventions for ensuring better integration of children in education, which apply to both, Roma and migrant children, even if in the last years more attention was on the migrants, especially refugees. In Table 1 we list some of the good practices summarised by European civil society for education (2016) and some of them also by European Commission (2016).

Table 1. Proposed interventions for ensuring better integration of children in education.

Good practices	
European civil society for education (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>intercultural competences of children/students</i> (immigrant and non-immigrant individuals; Roma and non-Roma children require strong intercultural competences which will allow them to engage appropriately, effectively and respectfully in intercultural interaction and dialogue with people from other cultural backgrounds),
and European Commission (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>promoting non-segregated and welcoming learning environments and opportunities for all, promoting pre-school education</i> (it has proven to be efficient in tackling poverty and social exclusion and making sure that children are

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> given the chance to realise their full potentials), • <i>extracurricular activities in enhancing social inclusion</i>, such as: non-school initiatives (eg. focusing on literacy and numeracy, music school, sport etc.) supporting schools to open their doors to communities and to become multifunctional communities centres connected with social partners including volunteering organisations, • <i>overcoming the language barriers for full participation</i> and providing quickly language instruction for immigrants (teachers that teach in language programmes should be provided with advanced trainings in teaching the language of host country as a foreign language), • <i>recognising the competences and qualifications of migrants/ refugees</i> – facilitators of access to further education and to labour market.
European civil society for education (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>parental involvement</i> (parental attitudes towards education, the school, the principal, teachers and other staff have a high impact on children's ability to be successful; as disadvantaged parents tend to be less involved in their children schooling, it is important to provide additional support and guidance for parents- links between school and parents should be prioritised e. g. through home visits), • <i>culturally relevant curriculum (curricula that is avoiding mono-cultural orientation); teacher competences for multilingual and multicultural classrooms</i> (it is important that teachers receive all the trainings and support to be qualified to teach in multicultural classrooms, including insights into cultural backgrounds of pupils), • <i>trained school leadership on diversity and intercultural pedagogy</i> (school leadership has important role in adapting learning environments to the specific mix of students and local circumstances; this is why it is important that also school leader are properly trained).

Source: adapted from European civil society for education (2016), European Commission (2016)

NESET (2016) discusses the importance of interventions proposed by European civil society for education (2016), it especially stresses the importance of extracurricular activities in enhancing social inclusion, which is relevant to both Roma and migrants children.

In relation to inclusion of Roma, the following initiatives shall be added as important (Council of Europe, 2006): teachers trained on Roma issues, inclusion of Roma history and culture in national curricula, establishing Roma assistants or mediators, ensuring sufficient financial support for Roma children (eg. free meals, free transport, free learning material etc.).

3. Roma and migrants children at school – situation in Slovenia

The situation in Slovenia will be explained through some statistical data, national documents and policies, and data from international research. We will also highlight the conclusions we have reached with the implementation of the focus group and interviews within the RoMigSc project. Given that the migrants and Roma are different fields, each group is presented separately.

3.1. Inclusion of migrant children in Slovenia schools

Around thousand children come every year to Slovenia. The main share of (economic) migrants is coming from the Former Yugoslavia, without the knowledge of the Slovenian language. The legislation provides them to study under the same conditions as Slovenian children. In 2017, we have in the schools also around 100 children *with international protection* and those who apply for international protection (data from Ministry of Interior).

The main policy documents on inclusion of migrants in schools are: A strategy for involving children, pupils and students of migrants in the system of education in the Republic of Slovenia (MŠŠ, 2007) and Guidelines for inclusion of migrant children in kindergartens and schools (ZRŠŠ, 2012). The recommended model of inclusion by the Ministry of Education (MIZŠ, 2016) is a two-stage model of integration of children with international protection into the educational system. Before the school year begins, it is recommended that migrants attend 20 hours of introductory hours, mainly focused on learning Slovenian language and getting familiar with the new school environment. In the transition period of additional two school years, migrants are included in the individual programme with additional hours of Slovenian language - up to 120 hours (MIZŠ, 2016).

The legislation foresees mainly the inclusion of migrants in primary schools. However, the challenge is inclusion of children/pupils with no certificates of schooling into the secondary schools. In this respect, the Ministry is preparing the protocol (MIZŠ, 2016) on the integration of minors' asylum seekers with and without certified education documentation into Slovenian upper secondary education (unaccompanied and accompanied minors). Proposed protocol includes a basic language competence program as well as a test for the assessment of the completed educational level.

PISA results from 2012 show that on the tests of readings, migrant children in Slovenia have approx. for 48 points lower results, comparing them with the children of non-migrant background, 44% of migrant children fall under the de-privileged (OECD, 2012). According to Migrant integration policy Index (2015), half of the children whose mothers have low education and were born abroad do not have mathematic skills, for which it is estimated that present the pre-condition for success in our developed society.

3.2. Inclusion of Roma children in Slovenia schools

It is estimated that around 2000 Roma children attended primary school in 2016/17, while for kindergartens and secondary schools we do not have any data. It is not allowed to keep the records on children based on ethnical groups; in addition, a lot of Roma children are de-facto integrated (east-north part of Slovenia).

The main policy document on inclusion of Roma in schools is the Strategy of Education for Roma in the Republic of Slovenia (MIZŠ, 2004 and supplemented in 2011), which defines premises, principles, goals and basic solutions for effective inclusion of Roma in education. The strategy/policy foresees:

- the integration of Roma children in preschool programs no later than four years old,
- the introduction of Roma assistants (an additional teacher in the class),
- adaptation of the curriculum and heterogeneous classes,
- professional trainings for teachers/educators and different forms of learning assistance,
- adult education of Roma, building Roma parents trust towards school and
- removing prejudices of the majority population towards the Roma, overcoming the belief that Roma pupils are pupils with special needs.

Important step on promoting inclusion of Roma is introduction of Roma assistant. Trainings for Roma assistants started in 2008 (Bačlija and Grabner, 2014). In 2016/17 there were 26 Roma assistants employed - they worked in 31 elementary schools and 9 kindergartens (CŠOD, 2017). However, position of Roma assistant has not been yet systematised (assistants are currently employed only through the projects). Some educational texts (books) in the Roma language were published to support the curriculum and a network was set up - all schools with Roma children in view of promoting exchanges of experience and good practice.

3.3. Findings from focus group and interviews within the RoMigSc project

In frame of the project RoMigSc we conducted a focus group and interviews with different stakeholders working with migrant and Roma children related to their schooling (policy makers and officers, teachers, head teachers).

Respondents emphasized the following main facts regarding inclusion of migrants in schools: the lack of language competencies of host country increases risks for un-success and in this respect more hours of Slovenian language shall be financed by the state; integration is more difficult for children from the lower socio-economic status & for unaccompanied children; the difficulties of integration of parents into new country is also risk factor for un-success of migrant children. support for migrant children in Slovenia is more ad-hoc, project based and not systematized; different project are being implemented to improve the professional skills of leadership and teachers in schools; it is very important that schools are able to find innovative solutions for inclusion by themselves (eg organization of workshops, intensive courses for learning Slovenian etc.); there is a need of setting the rules for integration of pupils without certificates into the secondary schools.

Respondents emphasized the following main facts regarding inclusion of Roma in schools: poor knowledge of Slovenian language as a risk factor; frequent unjustified absence from classes as a risk factor; pupils (of Roma and non-Roma cultures) are not prepared for co-existence; low expectations from teachers' side, in this respect there is a need for more teachers' trainings related to Roma tradition, culture, expectations and problems of Roma families and on the knowledge & skills on how to encourage learning of Slovenian language among Roma pupils that do not speak Slovenian; parents do not present the knowledge as value to their children; low cooperation of parents with schools.

For both groups of children (migrants and Roma) respondents stressed that it is very important to encourage cooperation of school with wider community, and volunteering organizations.

4. Pilot seminars/trainings and small scale research

In the empirical part of our article, we present an analysis of the questionnaire on the topic of integration of migrants and Roma into schools that we conducted with participants of pilot seminars. The seminars were carried out as part of the RoMigSc project in June 2017. The questionnaire (close and open questions) was developed and disseminated with the help of IKA, which is an open source application that enables services for online surveys. The questionnaire was available in Slovene as well as the English language.

The aim of the survey was to gather data about:

- the participants and their current position in the field of migrant and Roma related activities,
- level of satisfaction with the seminars and suggestions for future activities of the project and
- their experiences working in multicultural environment, what are the advantages, and what the obstacles/problems.

The questionnaire was sent to 185 registered seminar participants. The response rate was 40% which means that we got 74 valid responses, 68 of them in the Slovene language. The average age of the respondents was 41 years. 26% of the respondents were male and the rest (73%) female.

4.1. The participants/respondents and their current position in the field of migrant and Roma related activities

More than half of the respondents (57%) are involved in the work migrant children and a little less of them (47%) work with Roma children. In nearly half of the cases (47%), the respondents include volunteers in their activities. Only 6% of the participants stress that they are not involved in any activity related to migrant or Roma children neither in volunteering. 72% of the respondents claimed that they had previous experience with specific methods to integrate Roma and migrant children into the learning environment. 75% of the respondents came to the seminar because of their professional interest; on the other hand, 16% of them came for personal interest. The others listed several other reasons such as interest for novelties, useful practices, and an invitation from the organiser as well as membership in a project. Majority of the participants are coming from school.

4.2. Participants experiences working in multicultural environment, what are the advantages, and what the obstacles/problems

The respondents gave us quite some suggestions how to improve the work with Roma and migrant children in the future. We asked them about the opportunities and possible new approaches in the areas of the project as well as about the problems they are facing when dealing with migrant and Roma population.

In the questionnaire, we asked the participants also about their advantages which they may apply in a multicultural environment. The reason to collect those ideas was to find out what are the main factors of successful work with Roma and migrant children in the field of integration and inclusion in school system. We divided their answers in following groups, presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants advantages which may apply in a multicultural environment – categories and typical answers.

Category	Typical answers
Knowledge and experiences	<i>Long-time work with Roma and migrants/refugees.</i> <i>Experience in this field, positive attitude, mutual assistance, volunteer work.</i> <i>Wide knowledge and experience, looking for solutions to the problem, personal relationship and involvement.</i>
Intercultural competencies	<i>Acceptance and understanding of Roma culture, empath, patience.</i> <i>Understanding of the cultural background, willingness to listen, awareness of difference.</i> <i>I am blind to the color of the skin, I have the ability to accept people from different cultural and social environments into our living environment.</i>
Other	<i>I do not have experiences of working in such a class...</i>

On the other hand, there might be also quite some factors which may negatively influence the inclusion of migrant and Roma children in schools. We asked our participants about this issue. In the Table 3, there is the analyze, their typical answers grouped in four categories.

Table 3. Factors which may negatively influence the inclusion of migrant and Roma children in schools – categories and typical answers.

Category	Typical answers
Policy problems	<i>Incompatibility of policies and measures, things/solutions are moving too slow at the system level.</i> <i>Too many children in the classroom.</i> <i>We lack time, to many tasks and there is little time for individual work with parents and children.</i>
Difficulties in ensuring inclusion of Roma/migrant in classes	<i>Learning difficulties, lack of basic knowledge, lack of language knowledge.</i> <i>Problematic relationship with the child's parents.</i> <i>Non-acceptance of the environment (Roma) & not understanding the language (migrants).</i> <i>Obstacle is the non-involvement and interest of Roma (parents) for the cooperation.</i>
Lack of knowledge, competencies of teachers	<i>Teachers and teachers' graduates do not know enough about ethnic minorities (Roma, migrants).</i> <i>Changing the curriculum in teacher education.</i> <i>Teachers too often see everything/everybody as a problem.</i>
Other	<i>Insufficient interest among young people for volunteering.</i> <i>Not enough good will, positive approach towards problems.</i>

4.3. Level of satisfaction with the seminars and suggestions for future activities of the project

In the questionnaire, we asked the respondents about the usefulness of specific elements of the seminars (Discussions about the general context of integration of Roma and migrants in schools and society, Presentations delivered by the international experts, Exchange of experience with peers and colleagues, Exchange of experience with international experts). On the scale of 1 to 4 all the elements of the seminars were graded from 3.6 to 3.8. The respondents were satisfied the most with the exchange of experience with their peers and colleagues (3.8). On the other hand, the lowest satisfaction, but still very high graded, seemed to be with the presentations and exchange of experience of international experts – members of the project team (3.6).

The aim of the pilot seminars was both: (i) to provide the participants with some knowledge and experience from international context, (ii) to enable the exchange of knowledge and expertise between the participants and between the project team and the participants.

Nearly 80% of the respondents noted that they have fully experienced opportunities to express their suggestions and opinions during the seminars and only 1 person seemed to be extremely unsatisfied in this area. On the other hand, little fewer respondents perceived that they have had the opportunity to obtain new knowledge. Still, the

percentage is very high – 72%. One of the participants claimed that he/she has not had a chance to learn something new.

In the open questionnaire, we asked the participants about most valuable lessons learned during the seminar. We sorted their answers into four categories, as we present in Table 4.

Table 4. Lessons learned during the seminar – categories and typical answers.

Category	Typical answers
Building social network	<i>It is necessary to cooperate at all levels.</i> <i>The most valuable was to meet other people, to get new contacts for future cooperation, discussions with colleagues.</i>
Transfer of experience	<i>I liked exchange of practical experiences with colleagues.</i> <i>Presented were experience from other countries.</i> <i>We really had the opportunity to talk about the problems.</i>
Involvement of volunteers	<i>Volunteers are needed and could be very helpful.</i> <i>Student volunteering would be very welcome, especially for extra-curricular activities.</i> <i>The course that acknowledge volunteering work as ECTS is really needed.</i>
Other	<i>Solidarity is an important value.</i> <i>It is needed to approach children from a more personal level.</i> <i>It is better to live in a refugee country than in a country where refugees are leaving.</i>

Building a social network could be discussed as a broad theoretical concept, but it has also very useful and concrete applications. Babnik, Trunk and Dermol (2014) argue that individuals learn more in teams and their constructed knowledge has an impact on creating learning organization. Klemenčič, Mirazchiyski and Sandoval-Hernández (2014) stressed the importance of parental involvement in school activities in relation to student achievement. Building a network means also that the people share common values, Simatupang T.M., P. Piboonrunroj and S. J. Williams (2017) proposed new value chain thinking that involves a chain of activities linked to one another in order to sustain values.

The respondents gave us also quite some information related to possible improvements of our project approaches and seminars as well as the creation of opportunities that would enable them and other stakeholders to improve the work with migrant and Roma population as well as the results of this work.

Regarding the future developments of the project and especially the seminars, the respondents emphasised the need to add more case studies (30%) as well as discussions (26%). Less important for the efficiency related to their work with Roma students or children or with the ones with migration background seemed to be opportunities to express their suggestions and opinions (16%), practical exercises (14%) and presentations (11%). It appeared that majority of the respondents do not expect any theory to be added into the future seminars. Only 4 respondents stressed out the importance of inclusion of theory, primarily related to integration and assimilation issues.

5. Conclusions

Small scale research gave us insight on how respondents see the issue of integration of roma and migrants in schools, what are their advantages in working in multicultural environment and what are according to their opinions the most demanding challenges and problems in this area.

The main opportunities/approaches in improving the work in multicultural environment on the level of teachers/individuals refer to personal attitudes and mental frames. For example, they stressed out the importance of empathy, acceptance of people from other cultural and social environments as well as the meaning of being patient. Besides, they emphasised the meaning of the skills of understanding other people and the ability of searching for solutions instead of focusing solely on problems. They were of the opinion, that experience in the field as well as sociological and psychological knowledge is crucial.

The problems, which may hinder inclusion of migrant and Roma children in schools, may be divided into three levels:

- national level related mostly to national policies and coordination at the level of ministries and other governmental and non-governmental organisations,
- the level of schools and skills of teachers, and
- the level of individuals and possible volunteers, especially the lack of them.

At the national policy level, the challenges may be to solve the problems of incompatibility of policies and measures in the area of the project as well as improvements of responsiveness of local and national authorities to initiatives and proposal of different public and non-governmental organisation. As a key problem, the lack of good will was mentioned.

At the school level, the knowledge and skills of all people involved are crucial. Many of the schools, kindergartens, as well as student dormitories or local communities deal with the matter of Roma and migrant inclusion in schools without careful consideration and without necessary knowledge and experience in this field. Problems are also negative attitudes of the teachers who too often see everything as a problem. In this respect, the importance of responsible school leadership and the need for positive teachers' attitudes needs to be addressed. As Siebens et al (2014) conclude in their research that social responsibility (integrity and value-based attitude) must be the final answer to the question as to why a school has to build this policymaking competence, why effectiveness and quality in education are crucial and urgent, why a school has to be broad to be good.

We list possible challenges and improvements, which should be tackled in the future:

- continue with open discussions at national level, inviting representatives of responsible ministries and governmental organisations to participate at such events,
- to encourage discussion between public and non-governmental organisations and ministries.
- to emphasise the need for coordination of activities of different players at various levels in the field of inclusion of Roma and migrant children in schools,
- to improve the knowledge of teachers and students (teaching profession) from ethnic majority on the issues related to minorities (Roma, migrants),
- to increase interest among young people for volunteering (gaining competences for life and the course with ECTS) and how to deal with the problem of non-acceptance of the migrant and Roma themes by the social environment.

For ensuring successful inclusive education, it is very important to involve all actors for work on a common vision: policy makers, teachers and school leadership, parents, social partners and NGOs, including volunteering organisations (European civil society for education, 2016). So we can talk about responsible management at different levels.

OECD (2011) discuss the schooling experience as an impacts to social cohesion, as it shapes and transmits common values that underpin social capital and inclusion. How children are schooled is important to build their sense of belonging to a society. Greater inclusiveness of schools for all social groups can also result from the development of teaching techniques and curricula that foster diversity and enhance positive perceptions of others within the system and society. Countries where inclusion at school is greater are generally those where trust between different groups in society is stronger. By ensuring inclusion, social capital increases, making a more productive economy and society.

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