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PAL LAB

Pedagogical approaches for upskilling of teachers, mediators and experts working with Romani children and youth – Equal Opportunities and reducing early school leaving

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Competence Matrix for teachers and mediators working with Romani children and youth

Interviews with teachers and mediators Report

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INDEX

PROJECT PARTNERS	2
REPORT COLLECTION	3
1. GENERAL INFORMATION	3
2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES	3
Executive summary of Romania	3
Executive summary of Türkiye.....	3
Executive summary of Greece	4
Executive summary of Belgium.....	4
Executive summary of Bulgaria.....	5
3. HIGHLIGHTS	5
Highlights from Romania	5
Highlights from Türkiye.....	10
Highlights from Greece	13
Highlights from Belgium	16
Highlights from Bulgaria	19
METHODOLOGY & TRAINING MATERIALS, TOOLS&RESOURCES PROPOSED	21
Romania	21
Türkiye.....	22
Greece.....	23
Belgium	24
Bulgaria.....	25



Project Partners

	<p>CENTRUL JUDEȚEAN DE RESURSE ȘI ASISTENȚA EDUCATIONALĂ BRAȘOV www.cjraebrasov.ro</p> <p>CJRAE Brașov is a regional educational centre with 128 employees, 115 of them being teachers as school counsellors plus speech therapists. CJRAE Brașov is the only employer for every school counsellor and speech therapist in Brașov County. Our counselors work in collaboration with the entire school community, they work closely with students to plan their course of studies, to support their school performance, to review progress, to set academic goals, as well as to implement academic interventions.</p>
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	<p>AELIAPATH www.aeliapath.edu.gr</p> <p>AeliaPath is a social cooperative organization of Holistic & Experiential Learning based in Thessaloniki, Greece. Our vision is to create the conditions that will lead to a positive change in education. In this line, the design of AeliaPath's programs supports the principles of the Incheon Declaration & Framework for Action towards inclusive and equitable quality education for All, according to Education 2030 by UNESCO.</p>
	<p>PAL NETWORK www.palnetwork.eu</p> <p>PAL NETWORK is a newly established organisation that has been created with the aim of contributing to the research, policy and practice on topics that fall under the following areas: Education and Lifelong Learning, Career and Employability, Entrepreneurship and Employment, Social Policy and Social Inclusion.</p>
	<p>FONDATSIYA OBRAZOVATELNO SATRUDNICHESTVO www.ecf.bg</p> <p>Educational Co-operation Foundation (ECF) is a non-profit legal entity entitled to provide public services. The Foundation has an efficient team of 5 staff members and 2 volunteers and its portfolio demonstrates significant experience both as a leading and partner organisation in a variety of projects and initiatives at national, regional, European, as well as international level.</p>



Report Collection

1. General Information

Name/Title of the Report Task 2.2: *Interviews with teachers and mediators Report*

Name of the Organization responsible for the Report
CCREA(Romania), MUSEV(Turkiye), AeliaPath(Greece), Educational cooperation
foundation(Bulgaria), PAL Network(Belgium)

Year of publication 2023

2. Executive Summaries

Executive summary of Romania

First, I have been to schools and talked to principals and teachers, then I have developed an interview for teachers and send it on e-mail to:

- school mediators,
- primary teachers,
- secondary teachers,
- high school teachers,
- school counsellors.

I have to mention that the discussions were brief, and teachers said that they need time to think about answers, about the reasons for early school leaving and suggestions of possible solutions. This is why they agreed to complete the form.

Executive summary of Türkiye

The meeting was held online with;
Administrators of the regional schools,
the R&D unit supervisor of the Regional Directorate of National Education,
Experts from the Regional Directorate of National Education,
program developers,
university lecturers,
school principals,
teachers,
NGO representatives,
municipality representative,
representative of the provincial directorate of agriculture and forests,
the reasons for early school leaving and solution suggestions were discussed in detail. The following determinations in the following sections were discussed and shared.



Executive summary of Greece

AeliaPath conducted interviews involving 12 professionals representing diverse backgrounds, including teachers from the Roma community who have undergone formal education and became teachers and mediators, as well as teachers, NGO representatives, mediators, social scientists, and social workers members of the Action Team for Social Inclusion and Empowerment of Roma in Central and Western Greece, participated in the interview. The interview was specifically focused on exploring the factors that contribute to early school dropout among Roma students and proposing potential solutions to address this issue in Greece.

The discussion encompassed a range of critical topics pertaining to the current educational landscape in the country. These topics included the influence of national policies on the educational system, the implementation of assessment methodologies within classrooms, the attitudes of Roma parents towards education, and the everyday challenges encountered by teachers working directly with Roma communities. The dialogue aimed to shed light on the complex dynamics involved in fostering the integration and adaptation of Roma students in schools, informed by academic and scientific perspectives.

Executive summary of Belgium

In order to inform about the project and the purpose of the candidates' participation, we have organized an online meeting to present the project and its objectives and explain the aims of this interview. Participants came from the following categories:

- School teachers (primary – secondary education)
- School principals
- School cancellors and mediators
- Regional services representatives
- Parents members of the PTA (Parent Teacher Association)

Following the informative meeting, we have sent the interview questions to all participants in order for them to study them and get prepared, according to their request. We have conducted group interviews with some of the participants (mainly those that are coming from the same schools) and some one-to-one interviews to have a more in-depth discussion.

Most of the participants were really engaged and descriptive on their views and opinions, but there were a few that were not so analytical in their responses.



Executive summary of Bulgaria

As part of our second task on the project PAL LAB, ECF Bulgaria has conducted a joint interview with 12 professionals working in the field of school education. The main objective of this interview was to identify the missing skills and competencies of teachers and mediators in segregated schools or schools with Romani children's high rate of participation in order to help their integration and adaptation.

ECF Bulgaria has decided to conduct this meeting Face2Face and invited the following professionals:

- university lecturers,
- school principals,
- teachers,
- NGO representatives
- teachers' trainings providers

The active discussion that happened as a result was engaged to discover the reasons for early school leaving of the target Roma students and outlined possible solution suggestions on how to deal with this problem in Bulgaria. A lot of topics were covered in regards to the current situation in Bulgaria, our national policies reflected in the educational system, evaluation methods used in class, Roma parents' attitudes towards education and the everyday reality for our teachers "in the field".

3.Highlights

Highlights from Romania

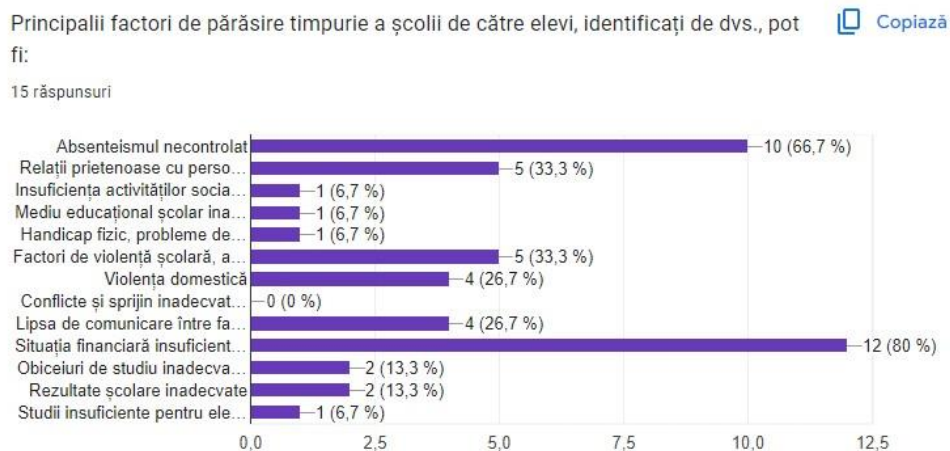
I have received 15 responses to my interview, from teachers working in Brasov' county schools with problems, mainly the early school leaving. The responders are in general females, one of them being a male, a common situation in Romania, because the lack of male employees in our educational system.

The professional experience is relevant (three of them up to ten years, six up to twenty years and the other six over twenty-one years). They are primary teachers, secondary and high school teachers of various subjects: Social Education, Geography, Romanian Language and Literature, Biology, Psychology, History, French.

I may add that they are teachers in various schools and in the Gymnasium School no.5 Sacele, which is the school from our Erasmus application, the largest school in Romania with Roma students.

The main factors responsible for early school leaving identified by them are, in order of relevance (see the figure below):

- Failure in classes Domestic violence, conflict and inadequate support for students, lack of communication between family and school, the insufficient financial situation of the family Inadequate or inappropriate study habits, inadequate academic achievement 80 %
- Uncontrolled absenteeism 66,7 %
- Friendly relations with people outside of school, the attractiveness of life outside of school 33,3%
- School violence, assault, threat, peer bullying, etc. factors 33,3%
- Inadequacy of social activities (folk dances, competitions, excursions, sports, arts, etc.), 26,7%
- Inadequate school education environment, tools and equipment 26,7%
- Physical disability, health problems (continuous), or insufficient guidance for students in risk groups, insufficient studies for students who tend to ESL of school 6,7%



Comments:

- Some students lose interest in school for various reasons, lack of parental education, poverty, violence.
- The precarious financial situation of pupils' families, family disinterest, lack of attention to their children, lack of parental education, lack of understanding of the role of school in children's lives are some of the causes of school drop-out.
- In the community where I work, absenteeism is often uncontrolled due to the family's precarious financial situation. Parents prefer to call on the help of secondary school students to help them with household work, to take care of young children of the family or those with health problems.
- Conditions at home do not provide a space conducive to study. There are many families with a parent who has gone abroad, the parent at home is overwhelmed with responsibilities, unable to supervise the school life of children.
- The poor family environment and context has a say in the matter, and



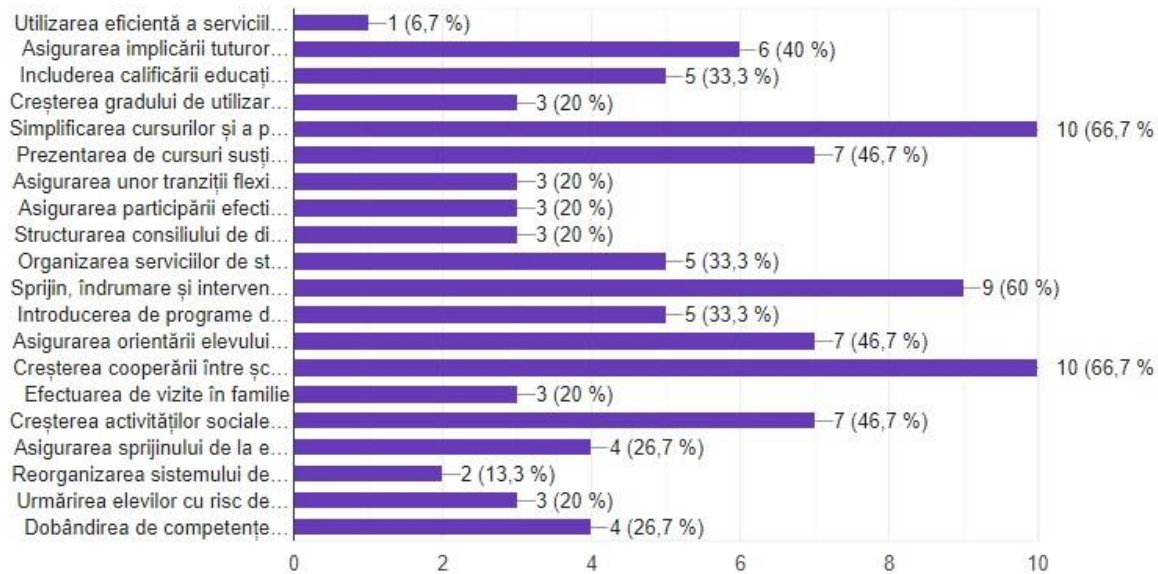
- the factors mentioned are influenced by this environment.
- Being a deprived area, most of the parents are unemployed, the children end up unable to continue their studies. Or, there are cases where the salary/salaries earned by the family members cannot cover the expenses of all the children, therefore the older ones (most of the time) have to give up in favour of the younger ones.
 - Another aspect of early school leaving is early 'marriage'. Many people still have that idea of dropping out of school to start a new family. Early marriages, we are told that...that's how it is with us, with the Roma.
 - Due to the fact that pupils come from a disadvantaged background, the causes of dropping out are due to several factors: lack of family interest, poor material situation that does not allow the purchase of the bare necessities to go to school (clothes, shoes, etc.).
 - I believe that these are the main causes of dropping out of school because, in most cases, the family is not sufficiently involved, not taking clear measures regarding the unjustified absence of students. Bullying, present daily among students through various forms of verbal/physical aggression, contributes significantly to the phenomenon of school dropout.
 - Pupils who accumulate a very high number of absences come from broken families, adults are not employed, income is limited, from begging or other inadequate sources.
 - Total lack of interest in school on the part of parents.
 - Use of children in order to get money or to help the family raise younger children.
 - Students develop friendships with individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds without financial means.
 - The teaching style of most teachers is a boring one, lacking usefulness in everyday life for the pupil so interest disappears.
 - Students in my high school, most of them work and come to high school at the same time. Financial situations are tough.
 - In order to carry out various activities at home, students are encouraged by their parents to miss.
 - The ones with various disabilities do not come to school due to lack of special conditions for them, although they are very well accepted by other peers.
 - The material situation of the family, habits passed down from the family regarding violence, aggression in school, the power of the inappropriate entourage, disinterest in learning.

Statements regarding the strategies and policies to prevent students from school ESL. They were asked to share their ideas about the definitions emerged from the desk research in ESL (Early school Leaving)

Itemii și declarațiile referitoare la strategiile și politicile de prevenire a abandonului elevilor de la școală cu care sunteți de acord:

Copiază

15 răspunsuri



The order of selected items is the following:

- Simplification of student courses and curricula in terms of content and duration 66,7%
- Increasing school, family and teacher cooperation 66,7%
- Support, guidance and effective intervention of Provincial authorities of Education, local authority or Central administration unit in the follow-up of school leaving 60%
- Presenting courses supported by social and cultural activities 46,7 %
- Ensuring that the student is guided to the profession and lessons he wants and is suitable for him 46,7%
- Increasing social, cultural and sports activities 46,7%
- Ensuring that all relevant ministries, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, stakeholders and families are involved in the issue through training 40%
- Including the qualification of education and rehabilitation support on ESL into the scope of all teacher training activities, including university education 33,3%
- Organizing study, compensation and guidance services for students at risk of school ESL 33,3%
- The introduction of orientation programs for students who have just started school and cannot succeed in their classes 33,3%
- Providing peer support for the students who tend to ESL of school with the support of successful students 26,7%
- Gaining self-learning skills 26,7%
- Increasing the use of gamification in students' lessons, effective and appropriate use of social networks, effective use of audio-visual based



- smart devices 20%
- Ensuring flexible transitions between classes 20%
- Ensuring effective participation of the classroom teacher, guidance service, school administration and family in the process 20%
- Structuring the disciplinary board, rules and functioning to prevent ESL 20%
- Making family visits 20%
- Following the students at risk of school ESL by the teachers to be assigned 20%
- Reorganization of the homework system 13,3%
- Efficient use of ICT (Information Communication Technologies) based, online, call center supported intervention and information services 6,7%

Comments:

- Preventing early school leaving is a complex, long-term process involving schools, authorities and families.
- Every pupil has the right to an education and equal opportunities for development. But it all depends on the way in which the educational process is carried out (parent, pupil, school, community, society). We are different. We have different needs. We need to look for ways to support and adapt to the needs of each pupil.
- A collaboration of several institutions, local authorities, NGOs, schools to monitor dropouts, effectively interventions and provide support for those at risk of dropping out would be extremely beneficial. For the children in my community, social, cultural and sports activities are relevant and successful. They make school more attractive and prepare students for learning.
- They can help to empower parents and through them children.
- Lessons should be simple, children at home should be able to manage any homework on their own.
- The authorities must offer support, through certain conditions that are up to them as a public institution, support for the parent. And if the parent feels supported, they can offer the child the same.
- I believe that support is needed from many quarters, relevant and real support, experts, in order to implement and support educational policies appropriate to the environments from which children at high risk of dropping out come.
- I believe that involving the family in the learning process would decrease the dropout rate. Another method that I consider useful is social and sports activities. Through them, the pupil has the chance to show how talented and creative he/she is.
- Empowering parents who are obliged to send their children to school. Sanctioning in some way parents who take away their children's right to education. Compulsory participation of parents in "re-education" courses on the importance of education in the child's personal and social development.
- Only through motivation can you get results.



- Collaboration with families and economic agents for a true labour market integration.
- These pupils do not cope with the curriculum, there should be a different curriculum for them. Shorter duration of classes, they don't manage to concentrate like other children.
- I think it is of interest to research especially the rural environment where we encounter such situations and the means we apply do not reduce the reduction of dropouts.
- First of all, the streamlining of the subject which is too busy and the involvement of all the bodies in the ministry in the reorganization of the educational act.
- We need support teachers for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and real cooperation with the police.
- Children by nature are flexible, open to new things.

I appreciate the sincerity and desire of teachers to tell their opinion and to be heard.

Highlights from Türkiye

Educators, especially school principals, share that the reason for absenteeism without informing the school, in other words, uncontrolled absenteeism, is seen when the family does not know about it, that is when there is a communication breakdown between the school and the parents. They share that among the students who experience absenteeism problems in the classes, most of which are foreign students, our novel students have a significant proportion.

The expert in charge of R&D at the Mamak District National Education Directorate stated that at the "Ata" school, a school located in the Mamak district, the majority of Romani students were and the absenteeism rate of these students was high. Again, in the study, it was shared that the main reason for absenteeism was economic inadequacy. It has been shared that in some cases where both parents have to work, children's early start in working life causes school dropout.

All educators agree that early school leaving is due to failure in lessons, domestic violence or conflict and insufficient support given to children afterward, loss of communication between family and school, insufficient financial income within the family, insufficient academic achievement as a result of the inadequate or unsuitable working environment.

Friendly relations with people around the school, the attractiveness of life around the school, and the inability to engage in social activities (folk dances, competitions, excursions, sports, art, etc.) are among the most important reasons for school dropouts.

It was said that the bindingness of social activities to the school was observed especially by the educators who did not establish social bonds with the school since the Romany students did not participate in social activities and did not



participate in such activities.

In addition, it has been said that insufficient equipment and an inadequate environment are important reasons for school dropout.

The negative effect of peer bullying was also shared from the information given about cyberbullying and peer bullying, which is the brain thesis study of School Principal İbrahim (Okan ERDEN). It was stated that peer bullying is one of the most important reasons for school dropout. The student who is bullied by other children, grouped, exposed to various humiliating situations, and forced to do things that are forbidden at school by some powerful people, tends to drop out. The publication of videos that will embarrass children, humiliate and hurt them, on social media channels, and reach thousands of people with the multiplier effect, causes the child not only to quit that school but also to stop reading completely. In addition, it was stated that the lack of effective deterrence by the disciplinary boards increased peer bullying.

Among the literature studies on early school leaving, the findings of UNICEF, the most comprehensive study conducted in Turkey in 2006, and master's theses on this subject were shared with the participants. Also, reference was made to Ercan KÜÇÜKARSLAN's graduate work.

In addition, it was stated by the lecturer from Kırıkkale University that drop-outs are common not only in secondary education but also in universities. It was said that augmented reality should be added to the course contents more. It was mentioned that the training should be done as a team and the importance of communication at all stages of the training. Gökhan ŞENGÜN from Kırıkkale University stated that his university thesis was on "social acceptance of mainstreaming students" and referred to his thesis and said that every stage of education is a whole. They pointed out that the students who need special education or rehabilitation should be identified and the necessary educational opportunities should be created and the necessary rehabilitation support should be given throughout the education process. It was said that a more productive education process would be experienced with students in a positive environment, where the harmony between administrators and teachers would increase the quality of education. It was explained with examples that managers' keeping all communication channels open will provide significant gains in this process.

The educators especially expressed that they would visit the families of the students at regular intervals and determine the problems arising from the family, taking into account the family structure of the child. Along with the importance of the family's level of awareness, sensitivity, positive communication and active listening, the importance of identifying the problems caused by the child's negative friend choices and acting in partnership with the teachers was emphasized.

It was said that school dropouts should be evaluated by taking into account the environment in which the child is located.

Teachers expressed that they should act collectively in all matters to ensure the effective participation of the guidance service, school management and family in the process. They said that the active participation of the students in the lessons, the endearment of the lesson and the continuation of the



education of self-confidence also play an important role. In their observations, it was stated that education should be evaluated as a whole as teachers, parents and students, but it is possible to be successful together. Particular attention was drawn to the importance of the teacher factor. The importance given by the Ministry to the studies on this subject was shared.

The importance of early diagnosis was emphasized.

E-school etc. It was said that the early warning system should be used more actively.

Making use of information systems and using technological devices and setting up classrooms such as flipped classrooms (such classes were held in cities such as Ordu, Rize) and attracting students' attention to education. It was shared that in order to train teachers, motivation should be increased. It was shared that various projects were carried out to prevent school dropout and that these should be disseminated. At the same time, it was said that the rotation of the teachers at intervals will increase the quality and bring dynamism. The studies carried out by ADAK and the General Directorate of Basic Education, which are among the projects carried out by the ministry, were mentioned.

Again, our university professors emphasized that the environment in which the child lives and reads has an important place in the education life of domestic violence and problems, and the importance of getting help from experts for the education of the family, and the importance of communication between NGOs and the School and Family Association.

Especially, educators said that social media and movies affect school dropouts and violence at school negatively, especially regarding the increase in the use of gamification-like techniques in students' lessons, the effective and appropriate use of social networks, and the effective use of audio-visual-based smart devices.

Peer support and positive orientation of club activities were explained by mentioning the subjects such as the intense course content and the application of flexible transition between classes.

All educators agree that a policy should be developed as a whole in order to ensure that all relevant ministries, local governments, non-governmental organizations, stakeholders, and families are included in the issue through training.

The importance of raising teachers' awareness about peer bullying was emphasized through public service announcements.

They also expressed their opinion that in addition to in-service training on this subject, training should be provided by experts on peer bullying in police departments and universities.

In addition, due to the fact that our education policies are based on forgiveness, one of the biggest obstacles for foreign (Roma) students is that the student continues to school without learning, especially if the language learning issue is not overcome. It was especially noted that a state policy should be developed to overcome the language issue.

It was stated that another reason for school dropouts was the early marriage of Roma children.



Particular attention was drawn to the importance of state school management and parent cooperation.

The importance of learning the course content, school follow-up, and the implementation of the penalty system after the disciplinary committee in Artificial Intelligence-based systems was mentioned.

The importance of early warning detection in parallel with the developing technology was mentioned.

E-school should be used more actively as an early warning system. It was especially expressed by our principals that the information messages sent to the parents should be free of charge.

In this context, it was said that all kinds of general information should be provided free of charge, not just as a notification of absence.

Our educators agree that warnings through the district governor or security channels will have more effective results, especially to remind that immigrants do not act sensitively in complying with the rules if there is no legal obligation.

It was emphasized that the effective use of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) based, online, call center supported intervention and information services, and the effective approach of the groups, and systems such as collective education and e-school, and early warning systems should be reported to the school management and resolved.

Highlights from Greece

Through our research and interviews with professionals from all over Greece, who either come from the Roma community or work with Roma children and youth, we have identified that economic hardship and social stereotypes are two primary factors that contribute to school dropout among Roma children. Particularly for girls, continuing their education in Gymnasium is nearly impossible as they are forced to marry at the age of 12. There is an imbalance in the classroom, as Roma children have not developed social skills or acceptable social behavior, and this condition is not accepted by non-Roma children. Consequently, Roma children are marginalized and excluded. The living conditions and economic difficulties they face are significant factors that contribute to their academic failure and, as a result, school dropout.

Children do not have even the most basic school supplies, which creates a sense of inferiority compared to other students. Also, living conditions in shanty towns where they face all weather conditions, very cold in winter, very hot in summer, leave them no margin to think about studying and homework they



may have for home, as the concept of "home" for these children does not exist, both literally and figuratively. In certain regions of the country, such as Soufli (northeastern Greece) and the broader area of Patras (southern Greece), there have been descriptions of more challenging living conditions compared to the wider Thessaloniki region. An intermediary from southern Greece described settlements with abysmal living conditions reminiscent of conditions in other countries like India. Shocking descriptions involve children living without water and food amidst heaps of garbage and rodents. Desperate mothers try to keep their children away from the mice in this situation.

The indifference and lack of boundaries set by parents, as well as intra-family violence, as described by several professionals, are serious factors contributing to school dropout. There are many cases of intra-family violence, neglect of children, and in recent years, the phenomenon of abandonment of children by their mother to their grandmother has emerged, due to a new marriage. This results in children not growing up with their parents but with other relatives who of course do not set boundaries and do not care about their academic performance and education.

One of the main factors highlighted by educators is the lack of communication between schools and families. Even in cases where children grow up with their parents, they may not be interested in their education but rather in securing state benefits. Specifically, the Greek state provides money to ROMA parents if their children attend school for a specific period of time. ROMA parents exploit this funding by sending their children to school on certain days in order to apply for this financial assistance. Some educators have noted that parents often present a different persona to their children when they are in the presence of teachers. They may tell their children to listen to their teacher and that the teacher is always right, but then adopt a different attitude at home and convey different beliefs to their children. We were also informed that many parents do not come to pick up their children who attend primary school, resulting in educators searching for parents and not being able to locate them. Moreover, parents feel "threatened" as non-Roma educators come to guide them on how



to raise and take care of their children. They are not easily trusting of individuals outside their community, so any attempt at counseling is perceived as an effort to manipulate them.

Another important factor that was highlighted by professionals is the lack of education and training for the teaching staff, as well as the lack of resources. In fact, in some schools there are no even A4 papers, which significantly hinders the work of educators. It is up to the goodwill of individuals who bring markers and other materials from home in order to be able to work.

Subsequently, policies and strategies that could help improve the situation were mentioned. Since many children attending Gymnasium (lower secondary school) had inadequate attendance and lack basic literacy skills, considering they are bilingual children, they are called upon to learn Ancient Greek and Ancient Literature. These subjects prove challenging even for children whose mother tongue is Greek. Therefore, several secondary education teachers propose reducing the curriculum and modifying the content of the study program for Roma children, taking into account their bilingualism.

Furthermore, they consider the existence of vocational orientation important for young Roma. Unfortunately, this subject does not exist in any school in Greece except for private ones. Therefore, its introduction to schools, specifically those attended by Roma students, will help further inform them.

Some professionals have suggested a significant initiative, which would involve mediators from the Roma community being present in every school to facilitate better communication and guide parents.

All participants in the research expressed the need for creating an atmosphere of trust and camaraderie among the classmates of Roma children within the school. Through specific training, educators should be able to unite the classroom and foster a friendly environment that discourages children from dropping out of school.

Additionally, it was mentioned that although there are numerous educators and mediators working in the field, they are not acquainted with each other, and



there is no space where they can exchange best practices, advice, and communicate with one another. Therefore, the proposal for creating a communication platform is a necessity for them. They also believe that there is a need for annual teacher training on issues related to Roma life, and for teachers to acquire the skills to teach through games and experiences.

Highlights from Belgium

In total we have contacted interviews with 10 participants from our target group either in group interviews or in one-to-one interviews. Most of the teaching staff came from schools that have a percentage of ROMA children and other segregated groups and are familiar with the challenges they are facing as well as their behavior and beliefs towards school, the educational system, and the society in general.

Throughout the interviews the following issues were raised and discussed:

The Roma people are among Europe's most disadvantaged populations and experience social exclusion while being treated differently from locals in the workplace, housing and education.

Due to their financial status, Roma children attend the poorest schools or face discrimination in schools where they are a minority. Some children are unfairly sent to "special education" centers for students with learning difficulties. In certain cases, the children may be denied access to education because they lack documentation, or they are simply unable to attend classes because they live far from the nearest school. As a result, Roma communities often suffer from low levels of education and this creates a form of inter-generational poverty.

Low registration and high drop-out rates

Romani and traveler children have a lot lower school registration and attendance rates and higher dropouts rates than the general population. Almost 20% of Roma children complete primary school as compared to 90% of non-Roma youngsters. Moreover, only 15% of Roma children finish upper-secondary school or job-related training.

Experts support that Roma children have a number of needs, that are not met and should be met in order for them to access schools to begin with. They lack food, clothing, documents. They have problems with language of instruction, and they lack their parents' engagements and service providers.

Moreover, Roma children face discrimination and even racism in some schools, and this is one of the main reasons they leave school at higher rates than non-Roma children. Others stop attending classes to help their family earn money, or take care of the home, or because they are expected to marry.

However, there have been many cases nowadays, in which children do not attend school and parents are not familiar with this situation. Due to the fact that both parents are working during the day, they have no supervision on their



children who act on their own and choose not to attend school and rather go around the city.

Housing and school access

Many Roma migrants live in informal camps where they have little access to running water and waste removal systems. These families face repeated forced evictions, some of them many times per year, and this constitutes a real barrier for them to settle in one place and have the needed time for doing every administrative procedure to get access to their rights. Schools in Belgium require a residency permit for school enrollment. As a result, evictions prevent enrollment and regular attendance in schools of Romani children.

In addition, these camps are usually located in industrial areas, far from city centers and schools. Roma children have major difficulties accessing schools on a daily basis and this discourages them from going.

Continued segregation

For the majority of Roma children there are three common situations: poorly financed schools where most students are Roma, schools where Roma are the minority, and special education centers for children with learning disabilities. In areas where most students are Roma, the schools are overcrowded, buildings are in poor condition and teacher quality is low. In schools where Roma children are the minority, they face discrimination from administrators, teachers, and students. They are often sent to separate classes or kept separate from other children within the classroom.

There are negative beliefs about the academic ability of Roma children and in many cases they are given academic placement tests. Very often, because of discrimination, Roma children are accepted in schools and even worse they often have to take entry tests and they are given results stating that they are not eligible to attend regular education and they are directed towards “special schools”.

Recognizing the intersectionality of Roma children

Roma children are discriminated against twice because of their affiliation to two marginalized groups: children and Roma. As members of the Roma community, they are subject to systematic discriminatory practices and policies which affect them by the simple reason of their ethnic group. As children, their voices and needs are overlooked, sometimes in favor of their parents' rights and other times in favor of non-Roma interests.

Early School Leaving rates differ among the three regions in Belgium. As it is apparent from the figure below, the Wallon Region and the Brussels Capital Region share almost the same percentage (9,7%-9,8%) while the Flemish Region has succeeded in lowering the rate to 6,7%. Actually, the Flemish Community is the only one of the three that has developed a concrete Action Plan for ESL back in 2013, adopting flexible learning pathways in secondary education, improving vocational secondary education and analyzing the impact of the labor market on early leaving.

ESL by region



According to the participants views the main factors for Early School Leaving in Belgium include:

- Not feeling included in the school curriculum
- Have experienced racism in mainstream schools
- Discrimination and bullying against them
- Family’s financial situation – not having the luxury of one or more family members not working and attending school
- None-engaging parents, or parents being afraid of their children being discriminated and unfairly mistreated at school by both teachers and other students
- Not finding the courses and lessons interesting and engaging
- Not understanding the necessity of attending school
- Finding their friends and activities outside school more attractive
- Non-easily accessible location of school
- Many Roma children have developed trauma in leaving and experiencing domestic violence which requires extra attention and special treatment
- Not so easy to study at home due to inadequate environment and insufficient tools



Highlights from Bulgaria

In more than an hour of discussion our participants exchanged a lot of practical and useful ideas. Their proposals and suggestions can be discovered below divided by fields.

National level of policies and legal situation

The teachers share the common feeling that they have to deal with everything on their own and that the system and our national policies does not support them in their efforts but on the contrary. They share the feedback that there are some policies on a national level that are unfortunately outdated and therefore not effective in reality or they simply don't work.

Educators expressed their concerns in regards to the lack of early diagnosis of learning disabilities of the students and relevant resources to deal with the issue - resource teachers, psychologists, speech therapists, adequate learning materials, designed for these students.

All educators agree that the educational policy towards educational integration of Roma children should be developed in order to ensure that all relevant ministries, local governments, schools, non-governmental organizations, stakeholders, and families are included in the process and take equal responsibility for the process and the results. For now, the responsibility rests solely with the school.

Family environment

The economic situation of the families is also a strong factor for the school dropouts.

The main problem is that the family members are mostly ill educated and unemployed and do not recognise education as a value for their children. They keep relying on financial assistance or on low-skilled or undeclared work which creates an environment of instability for children and does not support their sustainable school attendance and motivation to study.

Early marriages and parents capacity to raise children

Early marriages and early parenthood lead to insufficient care for the physical and intellectual development of their children.

Most students grow up in a complicated environment, where the ability to work at all costs is always put in front of any form of education. In some villages domestic violence and other forms of conflict are their everyday life. This forms an environment of total lack of support, communication in the family and lack of stability for the child to grow. When the child comes to school from such an environment there should be a different form of support and training at school as it "starts from another level". For example, it should be able to communicate with experts, therapists and the school, local authorities, NGOs, etc. should work to change the environment for that child.



Communication between school and the family

The lack of effective communication between the family and the school is also seen as a reason for dropouts. Professionals suggest that if this is improved many things will change.

The School as a factor for success

Participants expressed that they should act collectively in all matters to ensure the effective participation of the government organizations, school and family in the process. They said that the active participation of the students in the lessons, the curiosity for knowledge and the feeling of self-confidence also play an important role. Particular attention was drawn to the importance of the teacher as a motivator and a person who leads his students to success.

It was said that a more productive education process would be experienced in a positive environment, where the harmony and confidence between students and teachers would increase the quality of education.

They pointed out that the students who need special education or additional support should be identified and immediate support should be provided throughout the education process. It was said that a more productive education process would be experienced with students in a positive environment, where the harmony between administrators and teachers would increase the quality of education.

In addition, one of the biggest obstacles for Roma students is the Bulgarian language learning issue. It is not possible to lead the educational process if the teachers and the students speak different languages. It was especially noted that a state policy should be developed to overcome the language issue and make speaking of Bulgarian language in the school obligatory.

Main reasons for high dropout rates according to the professionals:

- Unjustified and uncontrolled absence from school
- Lack of support and motivation from the family
- Poor knowledge of Bulgarian language
- Lack of interactive learning resources and evaluation methods specifically designed for this target students

Strategies and recommendations:

- Flexible transitions between classes
- Adequate approaches to teaching, learning and students' achievements evaluation
- Equal start of educational path, through sufficient level of Bulgarian language
- Make children feel motivated, self confident and successful
- Strong involvement of parents in their children's education
- Make teachers's work highly appreciated on all levels



Methodology & Training materials, Tools&Resources proposed

Romania

- Development of personalised intervention plans. Application of interest questionnaires. Case studies.
- Counselling and personal development, Prevention and enforcement of risk behaviours, sex education.
- Following research and several opportunities for classroom application, non-formal, experiential and play-based teaching methods have been successful and have aroused the interest of all students.
- Non-formal activities to increase self-esteem. An interactive approach to teaching the subject through online means.
- Teaching materials, educational platforms, internet access.
- Adequate spaces with modern and up-to-date facilities to ensure the need for visual, interactive and non-formal learning in extracurricular activities.
- A real and very common problem is the lack of basic materials (school bags, notebooks, pencils, colours, etc.), lack of video projector, colour printer, teaching materials (paper, coloured paper, coloured cards, etc.).
- Various games, cards.
- Boards, crosswords, educational games.
- Books, films, worksheets.
- Educational counselling materials for both children and parents. Training must be on both fronts.
- Creating special materials with lighter and lighter content, at least for the first year after returning to school or depending on progress.
- Extracurricular activities.
- Learning through play, song, poetry.
- Materials as simple and understandable as possible for these children!
- Education/training courses for parents.
- Laptop; video projector, and smart board
- Financial resources to motivate and stimulate participation in courses.



Türkiye

- Cyberbullying and peer bullying education, increasing digital competencies
- Use of digital content course materials such as augmented reality
- In-school communication (administration-teacher-staff-students)
- School-family communication (visiting students' families at regular intervals)
- Effective participation of the guidance service, school management, and family in the process.
- Self-confidence training for students
- Early detection methods
- E-school etc. early warning systems
- Inside out training
- Good practice exchange sharing
- E-school etc. early warning system
- Gamification-based solutions
- Turning the power of social media in our favor
- Effective use of audio-visual-based smart devices
- Peer Education
- Effective Use of Social Clubs
- Family education (to prevent factors such as early marriage, and child labor)
- The collective action of ministries, local governments, non-governmental organizations, stakeholders and families, NGOs, school-family union
- In-Service Training in ESL and its sub-topics
- Artificial Intelligence based systems
- Legal Requirements
- ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) based, online, call center-supported intervention and information services



Greece

- Upgrading internal communication within the school among administration, teaching staff, support staff, and students.
- Improvement of school-family communication - strengthening the involvement of educational mediators.
- Offer of training for the development of students' self-confidence.
- Networking platforms for mediators and educators
- Utilizing game-based approaches in the learning process.
- Incorporating self-confidence development programs for students.
- Providing yearly teacher training on topics concerning the Roma community.
- Incorporate methods to provide support and foster motivation in students' engagement with the learning process.
- Promote family education programs aimed at preventing factors such as premature marriage and early parenthood.



Belgium

- Create and promote role models - Include Roma teachers in the teaching staff. Invite successful Roma professional to discuss with children.
- Include teaching moral values, giving them a sense of what is right and wrong, values that can guide them in their decisions and judgements, help them stay strong and boost their confidence. Best taught in early ages.
- Develop a tight relationship between children – teachers – families to set up goals and course of action, monitor development and achievement, provide guidance and advice.
- Counseling for parents and families.
- Personalized approach to students needs and tailor-made extra curricula activities to attract their interests and develop their competences.
- Upgrade teaching material to be more inclusive and engaging.
- Develop STEAM education approach that can boost the students' curiosity and involvement as well their creativity. Especially Arts constitutes a very significant part of education for Roma students – music, singing, theater, crafts.
- Introduce gamification where students learn through games.
- Boost Roma students' confidence by providing basic materials such as stationary as well as more advanced tools such as laptops.
- Reinforcement teaching – after class teaching for students that have trouble keeping up with the curricula. As well as orientation programs.
- Active participation and coordination of actions between ministries, local government, NGOs, Schools, and PTAs (Parent-Teacher Associations)



Bulgaria

- Improvement of In-school communication between the administration-teacher-staff-students
- Improvement in School-family communication - more involvement of the educational mediators
- Effective participation of the guidance service, school management, and family in the process.
- Individual / personalized approach to student's interests and needs (not generalized)
- Include Self-confidence training for students
- Define early problem detection methods
- Include strategies for support and motivation in students interest in teaching
- Good practice exchange sharing
- Gamification-based learning
- Effective use of audio-visual-based smart devices
- Peer Education
- Family education to prevent factors such as early marriage, and early child birth
- Unity of action of Bulgarian ministries, local governments, non-governmental organizations, stakeholders and families, NGOs, school-family union
- Appropriate legal Requirements



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PAL LAB

Pedagogical approaches for upskilling of teachers, mediators and experts working with Romani children and youth – Equal Opportunities and reducing early school leaving



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