Roma students and their inclusion in schools

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Abstract: The article discusses the role of education in Roma inclusion. Education is the basic right of all children. Diversity is seen as an advantage and opportunity to make schools more inclusive, but educational inequality is greatest among the Roma. Education has an important role, as schools work on integration processes. Research on teachers' attitudes towards Roma children

show that their willingness to work with Roma students needs strengthening. First, we present the current situation in the inclusion of Roma in schools. Next, we focus on analysis of the RoMigSc project data related to inclusion of Roma children at school. The analysis showed that educators and volunteers do not see Roma students as well-included in schools; the main obstacle for this is their low school attendance. Also, there is low cooperation between non-Roma and Roma students and parents, and Roma parents and schools, despite the schools' efforts.

Keywords: Roma children; social inclusion; school inclusion; integration; education; learning; parental cooperation; student cooperation; school enrolment; school attendance; RoMigSc project.

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1   Introduction

The opportunity for quality education is crucial, benefiting all children no matter who they are and where they come from. One of the social groups that is still socially and educationally marginalised, is undoubtedly the Roma. Education can not only help Roma children to acquire knowledge, but to promote their social and emotional well-being as well. As Rutigliano (2020) notes:

> "In spite of great efforts towards inclusive practices, the inclusion of Roma students in education remains a fundamental concern in Europe. Countries' education systems still face significant challenges impeding the efficient implementation of policies and projects in the long run." [Rutigliano, (2020), p.41]

It is estimated that between 10 and 12 million Roma live in Council of Europe countries, and about 70% of them live in Central and Eastern Europe (Amnesty International, 2013). Despite being part of different societies for many centuries, the European Commission (2013) points out that:

> "Poverty heightens the impact of social exclusion and ethnic discrimination, which, in turn, worsens their economic situation by denying Roma access to quality education and to proper jobs, healthcare and housing." [European Commission, (2013), p.16]

The inclusion of Roma children in education is necessary for several reasons. In the first place because of the discrimination experienced by Roma on the basis of belonging to an ethnic group. Discrimination is the result of stereotypes and prejudices against Roma. As Goga (2019, p.90) points, in such circumstances it is difficult to involve Roma in school activities.

Today, the integration of Roma into society is a challenge. Social science research continues to point out and confirm that Roma children remain excluded, despite the efforts of many countries to promote Roma inclusion. Although some progress has been

made, most lag behind the rest of the population and experience discrimination [Dermol et al., 2020; Frazer and Marlier, (2011), p.6; Goga, (2019), p.91].

The analysis of the causes of poor inclusion of Roma children often highlights the lack of interest of Roma children and parents in education and poor communication between school and parents (Clavería and Alonso, 2003; Vonta et al., 2011). Because of the treatment of Roma by teachers, other students and school institution in general, Roma do not continue with education in school. Parents of these children usually do not support and encourage them to go to school and, in addition, schools appear to be lenient when dealing with absence or occasional school attendance of Roma (Calogiannakis et al., 2018).

The low enrolment rate and high school drop-out rate are worrying across Europe. In South East Europe, only 18% of Roma attend secondary school, compared to 75% of the majority population and less than 1% attend university. In some countries, Roma children are referred to special schools only because they are different (Clavería and Alonso, 2003; GHK, 2011; UNICEF, 2011). Symeou (2015) argues that among the main factors contributing to the early school leaving of Roma children is the distance and disparity between Roma society and the majority population on the one hand, and the school environment and its functioning on the other.

According to UNESCO (2010), people who don't finish at least compulsory education, face high risks of living in poverty. Roma in particular have shown how difficult it is because they have difficulty finding employment, because most of them lack professional knowledge and competencies. In Bulgaria and Romania, Roma represent more than 20% of new jobseekers (European Commission, 2011; Goga, 2019).

Ensuring an inclusive school and environment is also an obligation imposed by a number of international instruments, such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), as well as all other movements and documents advocating for education for all.

In this article, we focus on the inclusion of Roma in the educational process. We first describe the current picture and possible reasons that lead to the marginalisation of the Roma, and give examples of good practice. We pay special attention to the results of the research within the RoMigSc project[1], with an emphasis on Roma inclusion. The project Inclusion of Roma and Migrants in Schools: Training, Open Discussions and Voluntary Youth Activities (RoMigSc) is a three-year project implemented in Slovenia, Italy, Germany, Turkey, Spain, and the Republic of Northern Macedonia.

The purpose of the project was to support better inclusion of Roma and migrants in education through the implementation of various activities. The project had five main goals (RoMigSc, n.d.):

- creating inclusive and democratic learning environments

- promoting youth participation, developing inclusive and youth awareness practices

- preventing and combating all forms of discrimination and segregation in education

- promoting mutual understanding and respect between people

- improving the quality of non-formal forms of education, youth work placements and volunteering.

This article has the following research questions:

1   To what extent education professionals and volunteers feel Roma students are included in schools?

2   To what extent education professionals and volunteers see school non-attendance as main issue for school inclusion of Roma students?

3   How strong is the cooperation between Roma, non-Roma students, parents, and schools?

4   How strong are the schools' efforts to integrate Roma students in school?

2   Attitudes towards Roma children

The inclusion of Roma children in education has been a priority for the EU for many years. However, the developed strategies do not always lead to implementation and the Roma remain vulnerable and discriminated. The segregation of Roma students can be traced for a long time in several countries: "Since the early 2000s, this situation has led the European Court of Human Rights to initiate various infringement procedures and sanctions under anti-discrimination and human rights international legal documents" [Rutigliano, (2020), p.44].

Educational achievements among Roma tend to be rather low. For example, a Hungarian survey found that the average performance of Roma students was lower than the average of most peers, half of them received poor or very poor grades in Hungarian language and mathematics. As the results from the 2003 cycle of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, there is a strong influence of socio-economic background on student performance [UNICEF, (2011), p.25].

In most countries, dropouts or lower qualifications of Roma are reported. The higher the enrolment of Roma students in schools is, the greater the problem of absenteeism tends to be [Frazer and Marlier, (2011), p.25]. On the other hand, the segregation of Roma children significantly contributes to negative learning outcomes [European Commission, 2013; Frazer and Marlier, (2011), p.5; Rorke, 2013]. In European countries, Roma children are very often placed in separate schools or classes. Many Roma children have to attend Roma schools which provide poor condition and where the quality of teaching is worse than in other schools, or are part of separate classes where all or at least most of the students are Roma. Approximately every eight Roma child is said to be mentally disturbed in primary school. Most of them are also transferred to classes for students with learning difficulties, some are in foster homes, where there are frequent cases of human rights violations [PREDIS, (2013), p.35].

> "Exclusion from the mainstream school system is one of the most damaging components of marginalization. Roma children are segregated in multiple ways: through placement in special schools, placement in special classes within mainstream schools, by way of residential segregation and through the use of 'private student status'." [Horvai, (2010), p.397]

Some of the reasons why Roma students drop out of school are low family income, parental inability to help them with homework, non-recognition of their first language, poor grades, unfriendly and non-inclusive school environment, and lack of support. Due to poor learning conditions at home and shaming because of their clothing, the possibility

of dropping out of school is six times higher for Roma children compared to others [PREDIS, (2013), p.41].

The curriculum plays an important role in promoting inclusion (Širca et al., 2017; Themelis and Foster, 2013). The contribution of Roma communities in the societies in which they live is often omitted from the curriculum, thus fostering notions that these communities are marginal and insignificant. In combating these issues, school practices can make an important contribution in making members of minority communities feel recognised and respected. Many culturally diverse schools celebrate all holidays, all communities represented in their school, including meetings, a practice that promotes a sense of acceptance and respect among all members of the school [Themelis and Foster, (2013), pp.5–6].

Classroom conditions are also very important because they affect the quality of education (Novak et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2011). This mainly refers to the environment in which the child learns, whether s/he is isolated or sitting with non-Roma children, or whether the teacher demonstrates acceptance. Often teachers who teach Roma agree to teach mixed classes. On the other hand, teachers who have no experience strongly resist. This calls for a comprehensive approach to the right to education. The findings from a Hungarian survey in 2002 showed that in schools where there were more than 75% of Roma students, on average 30.8% of teachers were unqualified. These teachers do not have adequate multicultural training, materials, or support to work effectively in intercultural classrooms [UNICEF, (2011), p.20].

The lack of intercultural education is reported by Theodorou and Symenou (2013), as they found that teachers reflect societal perceptions and stereotypes about Roma. A survey in Romania (Goga, 2019) found that more than half of the teachers do not know why Roma children are excluded from certain activities. Some cite laziness, impurity, torture or similar as possible reasons. The same survey identified that as many as 82% of teachers cite the following reasons for Roma children school drop out: poverty, family disorder, parents going abroad, illiteracy of parents, marriages at a young age and less interest of students or parents in school matters. However, two thirds of teachers answered that they themselves organise programs for better integration of Roma children (Goga, 2019).

Slovenian studies have also shown that teachers have lower expectations of Roma children and that the quality of teaching is poorer (Macura Milovanović, 2006; Novak et al., 2016; Vonta et al., 2011). These studies also show exclusion and discrimination by teachers and classmates and the inadequate response of teachers (Macura Milovanović, 2006; Symeou et al., 2009; Vonta et al., 2011). Roma children need an integrated approach to ensure the right to education (which includes access to education), the right to quality education and the right to respect within the learning environment. Roma children are at risk of being marginalised or discriminated, with these rights being violated. UNICEF (2011) sets out measures to ensure these rights for Roma: free pre-school education, available, accessible and inclusive primary education for all children, supported by the necessary resources, and measures in schools to combat discrimination and exclusion, promote equal opportunities for Roma children. However, access alone is not enough, education must be of high quality, which includes curriculum, learning and assessment in accordance with the culture and language of children, a child-friendly and healthy environment. The right to respect in the learning environment refers to respect for identity, rights to participation and integrity [UNICEF, (2011), pp.26–28].

"The impact of high-quality programs has been proven for all children, and especially for those coming from socially disadvantaged backgrounds" [Grunewald and Rolnick, 2007; in Vonta et al., (2011), p.18]. "There is a growing recognition that high-quality programs for all preschool children and their families can lead to greater progress in society as a whole" [Bennet, 2008; in Vonta et al., (2011), p.18]. In order to have quality programs, teachers need to be encouraged and supported, this is the only way to increase teacher motivation. Research has shown that appropriate rewarding of teachers who work with Roma children improves educational outcomes [UNICEF, (2011), p.57].

3   Good practices

EU Member States have devised various strategies for better inclusion of Roma in education, working towards a more 'integrated approach'. Of course, problems cannot be solved by educational solutions alone, but must be linked to other proactive measures, such as employment, housing and health [European Commission, (2013), p.29].

Frazer and Marlier (2011, p.8) list measures to promote the inclusion of Roma children in education and to eliminate educational deficiencies:

- stopping the segregation of Roma children and promoting their full inclusion in the education system

- increasing the level of participation of Roma children in education so that they can access compulsory education

- reducing early school leaving and encouraging greater participation in tertiary education

- tackling poverty, promoting participation in schools

- ensuring the inclusion of all Roma children in pre-school education, as this is crucial for their further success in education

- promoting inclusion in schools by recognising and valuing Roma culture and language and providing training for all those involved in Roma education

- involving assistants in schools with Roma students

- promoting awareness of parents and the community about the value of education and their involvement in the education of their children and strengthening links between school and parents

- development of an interdisciplinary approach that connects educational, health, social services

- tackling gender inequalities

- eliminating illiteracy and promoting adult education

- removing language barriers to participation in education and society.

Practices that have proven to be extremely successful in addressing shortcomings in Roma education in some countries (Romania, the Czech Republic, Spain) are mostly related to increased access to pre-school education. Slovakia, Latvia, Slovenia, Austria

and the Czech Republic have started to include Roma assistants to help teachers, thus improving the completion rate of Roma children. Free meals and school supplies have encouraged greater inclusion of children in schools in Romania and Slovakia. In Italy, cultural mediators were involved to provide a better communication between Roma children and other students [Frazer and Marlier, (2011), pp.51–53]. In Spain, mediators have been included in programs as well to reduce early school leaving and absenteeism among Roma students. In Finland, Roma assistants were also included in kindergartens (European Commission, 2012).

The Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative suggests the following components to support Roma children in schools in ways that promote their success [Rona and Lee, (2001), p.23]:

- a firm belief in the ability of all children to succeed, manifested in holding high expectations for children

- the use of mainstream curriculum

- the implementation of developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate classroom practice, supported by well-structured training and supervision of teachers and the addition of a Roma family coordinator to each class, bringing Roma culture

- language into the classroom and linking school and home.

There are many good practices which need to be talked about and encouraged. In this way, the negative attitude of the majority population towards the Roma can change. On the other hand, distrust and misconceptions of Roma about education can be overcome by raising awareness.

4   Methodology

In this paper, we explore teachers' views on Roma inclusion in schools. Below we present part of the results of the RoMigSc survey. One of the aims of the quantitative part of the RoMigSc was to obtain teachers' views on the inclusion of Roma students in schools.

To achieve our goal, RoMigSc used the survey questionnaire method. The survey collected data from education professionals with experience in working with migrant and Roma children via the 1KA web portal (1KA, n.d.). The survey was conducted in November 2019. The population consisted of all education professionals and volunteers who have experience with Roma and migrant children in schools. The sample (N = 301) is represented by all professionals and volunteers who participated in at least one RoMigSc project event or activity in the first three years of the project implementation.

The questionnaire included socio-demographic questions and statements that respondents defined on the basis of a four-, five-, or seven-point Likert scale. The statements measured attitudes towards the inclusion of migrants and Roma, attitudes towards inclusion and volunteering, attitudes towards the school's most important goals for better inclusion of migrants and Roma in school, and attitudes towards multiculturalism.

For the analysis presented in the article, we used the ninth set of questions in the questionnaire (question 25), which refers to views on Roma students' inclusion at school,

isolation, school attendance, cooperation with non-Roma students, cooperation with Roma students' parents, staff integration efforts, and Roma families' ties with schools. Question 25 from the RoMigSc questionnaire contains nine statements and each one is a Likert scale with seven response categories (1 – disagree completely; 7 – agree completely). The actual questions can be found in the Appendix.

Due to the low response rate, we used the data from all countries together and limited the analyses to descriptive techniques only. We computed the frequencies for the responses of all statements in question 25. The results are presented in the next section.

5   Results

The following tables present the results from the analyses of the questions related to Roma students' inclusion from the RoMigSc project. Table 1 presents the results related with the first research question – to what extent education professionals and volunteers feel Roma students are included in schools. As we see from the table, the majority of answers for the first statement are clustered towards the lower end of the response scale, i.e., most respondents tend to disagree that Roma students are socially well included into the schools. The higher percentage (16.6%) of the respondents choose category 3, below the centre point of the response scale and more than a half of the valid responses (54.2%) choose the centre point or lower category. At the same time the respondents also tend to agree that Roma students are socially isolated in the schools, although the highest percentage of respondents (16.3%) chose the centre point of the scale. These results show that indeed, the social inclusion of Roma students is still an issue.

Table 1   Perceptions on inclusion of Roma students in school

	Answer	*Roma students are socially well included into the schools*		*Roma students are socially isolated in the schools*	
		Count	*%*	*Count*	*%*
Valid	1	37	12.3	17	5.6
	2	29	9.6	22	7.3
	3	50	16.6	32	10.6
	4	47	15.6	49	16.3
	5	29	9.6	35	11.6
	6	16	5.3	24	8.0
	7	12	4.0	35	11.6
	Total	220	73.1	214	71.1
Missing	Omitted	81	26.9	87	28.9
Total	Total	301	100	301	100

Table 2 presents the results from the analysis related with the second research question – to what extent education professionals and volunteers see school non-attendance as main issue for school inclusion of Roma students. As the table shows, the majority of the answers of the education professionals and volunteers are shifted towards the centre point (4) or higher categories of the response scale (a total of 56.1%) with the highest percentage (15.6%) of respondents completely agreeing with the statement. Although the

pattern is not that clear because many of the higher end categories have similar percentages, the data clearly shows that school absenteeism is seen as an issue for Roma students' inclusion at school.

Table 2   Non-attendance as main issue for school inclusion of Roma students

	Answer	The main obstacle for better inclusion of Roma students in the schools is non-attendance	
		Count	*%*
Valid	1	8	2.7
	2	12	4.0
	3	18	6.0
	4	41	13.6
	5	39	13.0
	6	42	14.0
	7	47	15.6
	Total	207	68.8
Missing	Omitted	94	31.2
Total	Total	301	100

Table 3 and Table 4 present the results related with the third research question – how strong is the cooperation between Roma, non-Roma students, parents, and schools?

Table 3   Schools' efforts to integrate Roma students in school

	Answer	Roma students do not want to cooperate with other students		Other students do not want to cooperate with Roma students	
		Count	*%*	*Count*	*%*
Valid	1	30	10.0	16	5.3
	2	26	8.6	21	7.0
	3	39	13.0	31	10.3
	4	50	16.6	47	15.6
	5	26	8.6	40	13.3
	6	14	4.7	27	9.0
	7	24	8.0	29	9.6
	Total	209	69.4	211	70.1
Missing	Omitted	92	30.6	90	29.9
Total	Total	301	100	301	100

The results for the first statement (unwillingness of Roma students to cooperate with others, Table 3) show that most of the respondents (16.6%) choose the centre point of the scale (neither agree nor disagree). However, most of the respondents in total tend to choose the lower end of the scale (31.6%) than the higher end (21.3%), i.e., they tend to disagree that Roma students do not want to cooperate more than they agree. The next statement in Table 3 asks the opposite – if other students do not want to cooperate with Roma. The results are mirrored of the previous ones. Most of the respondents also choose

the centre point of the scale (neither agree nor disagree, 15.6%), but other than that most (31.9%) chose the higher end of the scale (i.e., tend to agree) and less (22.6%) choose the lower end (i.e., tend to disagree). It is quite similar for the next statement – the parents of non-Roma students are unwilling to cooperate with parents of Roma students (see Table 4). Most of the respondents (16.6%) again choose the centre point of the scale and most of the other responses (36.5%) are clustered at the higher end of the scale while the ones choosing the lower end of the scale is 15%, which is more than twice less. That is, in general the respondents see non-Roma students' parents as unwilling to cooperate with Roma students' parents. In quite similar manner are the results related with the last statement in Table 4 – cooperation between parents of Roma students and schools. The most respondents are again those choosing the centre point of the scale (16.9%). Besides them, most of the respondents (nearly (41%) agree the cooperation is weak and those who tend to disagree is nearly 4.5 times less (9.3% in total).

Table 4   Schools' efforts to integrate Roma students in school

	Answer	Parents of other students do not want to cooperate with parents of Roma students		Cooperation between parents of Roma students and schools is in general weak	
		Count	*%*	*Count*	*%*
Valid	1	7	2.3	4	1.3
	2	10	3.3	5	1.7
	3	28	9.3	19	6.3
	4	50	16.6	51	16.9
	5	36	12.0	36	12.0
	6	37	12.3	46	15.3
	7	37	12.3	41	13.6
	Total	205	68.1	202	67.1
Missing	Omitted	96	31.9	99	32.9
Total	Total	301	100	301	100

The analysis of the last two sets of statements in question 25 from the RoMigSc questionnaire is related with the last research question – how strong are the schools' efforts to integrate Roma students in school. The results are presented in Table 5. The highest percentages for both statements are for the centre point of the scale (neither agree or disagree) – 21.6% and 16.3% respectively. For the first statement (school staff is trying to integrate Roma students in school and is successful) the total percentage of respondents showing some level of disagreement (i.e., below the centre point of the response scale) is 12.6%, and of those agreeing is 34.9%. For the second statement (schools are trying to bring Roma students' parents to school) the distribution of responses on the scale is quite similar – the total percentage of disagreeing respondents is 11%, and the one for agreeing is 41.2%, although the ones agreeing are more than for the previous statement. That is, in general the respondents tend to see that schools are putting efforts to integrate Roma students and involve parents in school life.

Table 5 Schools' efforts to integrate Roma students in school?

	Answer	School staff is trying to integrate Roma students into schools and is successful in that		Schools are, in general, trying to find solutions to bring parents of Roma students to schools	
		Count	*%*	*Count*	*%*
Valid	1	6	2.0	5	1.7
	2	11	3.7	11	3.7
	3	21	7.0	17	5.6
	4	65	21.6	49	16.3
	5	43	14.3	47	15.6
	6	28	9.3	44	14.6
	7	34	11.3	33	11.0
	Total	208	69.1	206	68.4
Missing	Omitted	93	30.9	95	31.6
Total	Total	301	100	301	100

6 Conclusions and final remarks

The research questions of this article were related with the integration of Roma students in school: how included they are; is the non-attendance obstacle towards inclusion; how strong is the cooperation (students, parents and schools); and how strong efforts schools make for the inclusion.

The results show that, in general, the respondents tend to see Roma students as not well integrated in schools and, in a similar manner that they tend to be isolated. These findings coincides with previous findings in the literature (see Frazer and Marlier, 2011; Goga, 2019). As pointed out earlier, free access to education is basic, but not sufficient condition for inclusion (UNICEF, 2011). Most of the respondents point absenteeism as the major obstacle for inclusion. This finding also coincides with the findings from Calogiannakis et al. (2018) who also points that the reason for this is lack of parental support for Roma students, but also the leniency of the schools in case of absences. For the former, we also see that, in general, most of the respondents see weak ties between the Roma students' parents and the schools themselves, although they see the schools as making efforts to attract Roma parents to school and (successfully) integrate students in schools. Perhaps one of the measures to increase parental involvement in schools' life would be to organise more frequent parent-teachers conferences with the participation of both Roma and non-Roma parents. This is quite important because, as we see from the results, parents of non-Roma students are, in general, not willing to cooperate with parents of Roma student and this could increase the frequency of interactions between these two groups.

In addition to all said above, it is notable that respondents tend to agree that school staff makes efforts to include Roma students and involve their parents in school life. However, there are many respondents who cannot decide if they agree or disagree and the number of those who tend to agree is less than half in both cases. Of course, to succeed in

this mission, schools and teachers need support, as well as curriculum which takes into account the cultural diversity (Themelis and Foster, 2013). In addition, some previous sources (e.g., UNICEF, 2011) have found that teachers are often feeling unprepared and not qualified to work with Roma students and often reflect the societal perception and stereotypes about Roma people.

7   Discussion, implications for practice, directions for future research and limitations

All of the findings in this and previous studies call for more comprehensive approach towards inclusion of Roma children in school. The benefits are long-term and impact the entire society not only in terms of cultural integration, but also other aspects as economic deprivation and poverty, access to labour market and unemployment, and social exclusion and marginalisation observed among Roma people (European Commission, 2013; Goga, 2019). In addition, this approach would support active citizenship (Bezjak and Klemenčič, 2014) (developed at the momentum and also with impetus for the future) by its emphasis on maximalist conception of citizenship education or any other field of education, also through emphasising the processes of phenomenon of collective identities, but mostly by emphasis which leads to reflection on the common value base of society, justice, and at a final stage towards optimal democracy [Klemenčič, (2012), pp.116–117].

    Although in this article we focus on school level approach, it needs to be stressed that different actions on higher levels which would lead to more comprehensive approach towards inclusion of Roma children in schools are needed too. From the perspective of education policies and strategies to promote the right to quality education, different strategies are highlighted in the UNICEF report [UNICEF, (2011), pp.81–83]: child centred learning and assessment, curriculum development, improving teaching quality, creating child friendly, safe and healthy school environments (which also includes textbooks preparation), special warnings (not often exposed) about often violation of conversational implicatures are identified, and which can lead to ideological content (Klemenčič and Čepič Vogrinčič, 2014) (and even stereotypes), and measures at the local/municipal level.

    Therefore, inclusion of Roma students in schools should not only be a whole-school approach, it should be a whole community-approach, no matter how narrow or wide we define the community. One of the measures which can be proposed in this regard is to integrate the whole-school and whole-community approach – if parents of Roma students' attendance in such conferences remains low, is to make home visits which will keep parents informed about the school life and the academic performance of their children. In addition, school events to recognise and promote respect towards different cultures can be organised as well, a practice recognised as good by Themelis and Foster (2013), especially in culturally-diverse schools. In addition, although different studies in the era of COVID-19 pandemic describing a new generation off youths, e.g., Ahmed et al. (2020), we should not perceive the level of inclusion of Roma students into schools

as it is now as a 'new normal'. On contrary, 'new normal' should give us even bigger impetus for activities that raise inclusion of this vulnerable population into school systems. 'New normal' era showed us how important are thee attempts to provide, not only equal access, but also individualised approaches for different types of vulnerable students, including Roma students.

All of the above is related with the social development of students. Regardless of the environment students are situated in, they are not isolated from each other and from the rest of the society. Their interaction, especially in the classroom, can be an important prerequisite not only for cultural exchange, but also for learning and, more importantly, internalising certain behaviours and values from each other. All of this is in line with Bandura's (1971) social learning theory where children learn by observing others, i.e., learning from their social surrounding. Three key elements of the social learning theory are especially important in this process: retention, reproduction and motivation. Retention of certain observed and subsequently internalised models can be used as a response in e certain situation. This is related with the reproduction of previously learned behaviour or knowledge when required and improvement of the response. The last element, motivation, is related with understanding and valuing the consequences (reward or punishment) of exhibiting certain behaviour (Bandura, 1971). These elements of the social learning theory can have invaluable power for inclusion of Roma students in school by increasing the cooperation between Roma and non-Roma students. One of the main drivers of social learning is to make obvious the benefits of certain behaviour others have which, in turn, would enforce its reproduction by the self. Another one is to form mixed groups in the classroom where students can learn from each other through interaction. Perhaps peer coaching can be additional mean for increasing interaction between Roma and non-Roma students, not only in school, but in out-of-school activities as well.

It has to be noted, however, that Roma students are not the only group which deserves attention concerning inclusion and integration, and that different countries can experience similar issues regarding different minority groups. This is why the EU has placed education at the center of the integration issue, and clearly focuses its basic education policy guidelines around two key terms: 'inclusion in diversity' and 'equity' (Council of the European Union, 2017; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016), calling on Member States to reflect diversity in the school curriculum, take into account the specific challenges, take preventive measures against poor school performance, encourage early schooling, and increase their participation in higher education. The training of the professionals is the key, as it has been evidenced by other experiences in school inclusion (Baguisa and Ang-Manaig, 2019). Progress has certainly been made regarding the integration of minorities in schools. However, the data also indicate that some groups, such as Roma (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016) and migrants (Hippe and Jakubowski, 2018), present higher school failure and school-leaving rates, and few attend secondary school. Indeed, official governmental programs are often not enough to provide the professionals in school inclusion with the skills required, and so closeted segregation happens (Czyż, 2018). As we have seen in the RoMigSc project, the collaboration between the different countries made it possible to build a global vision of the intervention strategies carried out across the range of member states, the main elements to be taken into account, and a detecting the gaps that prevented maximum

effectiveness. After consulting experts from six different countries about their good practices on school inclusion (Rosser-Limiñana and de Juana-Espinosa, 2019), we found that these were essentially focused on minors, although also on the families of these minors or adults of the group whether they were in charge of minors or not. Another important block of actions was directed towards professionals: teachers, assistants, volunteers, etc. The actions concentrated especially on school support and improving language skills, although many also focused on supporting families, promoting multiculturalism, and the training of professionals working in multicultural environments.

The inclusion in school of Roma (or any other minority or vulnerable group) is not a purpose in itself. Education brings many social benefits. The inclusion in the educational process and receiving good education shall also result in better employment opportunities. The school-to-work transition is a critical juncture in shaping the career futures of at-risk youth (Lifshitz, 2017). Consequently, as Kongtong et al. (2020) indicated, preparing disadvantaged students to become human capital is challenging. Motivational and behavioural issues are often cited as a barrier to the quality of their learning and development. This is why the promotion of youth employment requires strong cooperation between all actors (especially the social partners, the education sector and civil society organisations), as well as between authorities at regional and local level (European Commission, 2016). To address these issues, Lifshitz (2017) suggests integrating efforts in three main domains: cultivating work-related skills, fostering personal and interpersonal skills, and providing a climate of personal and group support. In addition, Vidacek-Hains and Staba (2017) propose improving the quality of inclusion of students from underrepresented groups in the education system through the use of ICT, peers support and collaboration between educational institutions at all levels of education and the labour market. In addition, it should be noted that today's uncertain economic and social dynamics drive companies to seek the type of human talent that will help them survive and thrive (Rakowska and de Juana-Espinosa, 2021). In their study, after consulting an international panel of experts, the most valued employability skills were those of a generic nature. As for specific skills, those of a social and managerial nature were the most highly valued. According to the authors, work experience and formal education were less relevant to employability. Based on the partner countries' findings in the RoMigSc project we can conclude that the engagement of young people in voluntary work "is regarded as a valuable opportunity for social learning and personal development" [Dermol et al., (2019), p.143] which, in turn, strengthens their future employability. In addition to this, in many partner countries expanding language learning opportunities, strengthening communication and social learning, as well as general social work including participation in community organisations, can greatly impact competitiveness of the group for its members' future employability (Dermol et al., 2019).

Table 6 represents a synthesised summary of the possible measures to support the inclusion of Roma students in school through increased interaction between students, between parents and parents and schools. The table can serve as reference for stakeholders, practitioners, and future research on the topic.

Table 6 Synthesised summary of possible measures towards inclusion of Roma students in school

System level	*School level*	*Classroom level*	*Home and school/classroom interactions*
Curriculum development	Child centred learning and assessment	Child centred learning and assessment	Home visits
Creating child friendly, safe and healthy school environment	Creating child friendly, safe and healthy school environment	Creating child friendly, safe and healthy school environment	School events to recognise and promote respect towards different cultures
Improving teaching quality	Improving teaching quality	Improving teaching quality	
Measures at the local/municipal level		Mixed groups within classrooms	
		Peer coaching	

It is important to note that some of the measures appear in more than one column. This is because, as stated earlier, a whole-school and whole-community approach is needed to address the issue of school inclusion of Roma students. Thus, improving teaching quality, for example, appears as measure at system, school and classroom level. We believe that the implementation of these measures will serve the purpose of better inclusion of Roma students in school life.

The actual implementation of these measures, however, is not an easy task. Future research and practice shall be directed towards 'what works best' for each of these elements. Teaching in multicultural environment can be related with multiple issues and can depend on multiple factors [see Robles de Melendez and Beck (2019) for example]. Research on the factors related with teaching is highly needed, especially given the differences across the host cultures, as it is in Europe – some factors may have different impact on the level of inclusion in some of the countries compared to others.

Related with the previous, this study uses data from nine European countries included in the RoMigSc project. We acknowledge this as the main limitation of this study, given that Europe is quite diverse and research on such complex topic shall include more countries in more comparative manner than this article did, which is the second limitation, stemming from the low response rates which did not allow us to perform cross-country comparisons.

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Notes

1   The objectives of the project and its theoretical foundations, as well as countries experiences, are presented in monograph entitled EU Challenge to Build a Cohesive and Diverse Society (Dermol et al., 2019).

Appendix

Questions from the RoMigSc questionnaire used in this study

Q25 – How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1 – disagree completely … 7 – agree completely).

Please mark one category in each row.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Roma students are socially well included into the schools	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Roma students are socially isolated in the schools.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The main obstacle for better inclusion of Roma students in the schools is non-attendance.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Roma students do not want to cooperate with other students.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other students do not want to cooperate with Roma students.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Parents of other students do not want to cooperate with parents of Roma students.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
School staff is trying to integrate Roma students into schools and is successful in that.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Schools are, in general, trying to find solutions to bring parents of Roma students to schools.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Cooperation between parents of Roma students and schools is in general weak.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○