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## Working together for Roma Inclusive education

### 3rd transnational project meeting, Bulgaria, 15-16 May 2017

Newsletter #4  
May 2017

The 3<sup>rd</sup> transnational project meeting and study visit of the project took place in Pavlikeni and Veliko Turnovo in Bulgaria on 15-16 May 2017. The aim of the transnational meeting was the exchange of experience and peer learning. The project’s representatives met local organisations and actors related to inclusive education and had the opportunity to extensively discuss on issues related to Roma inclusive education.



On the first day of the study visit, partners visited Amalipe Centre for interethnic dialogue and tolerance. The Office Director of the Centre presented the aim of the Centre, the projects and the actions currently implemented. As she mentioned, “*education is an area in which Amalipe centre has worked since its inception*”. The activities of the organisation focus on reaching schools, teachers, parents and students across the country. The Centre implements a variety of activities and programmes on Roma inclusive

education. Among them is the programme “Every student will be a winner”. The programme aims at preventing dropout and assuring the retention of Roma students, increasing the number of Roma adults involved in any form of lifelong learning and increasing the percentage of Roma youth who continue their education in secondary and high schools.

She gave emphasis on the importance of parent’s participation in school life and she described in detail the ways that Amalipe Centre reaches and engages them. Partners from Romania and Greece expressed a great interest in learning more since they all shared the same concern on the importance of parental participation.

As mentioned, during the past academic year 2015-2016, the programme involved 177 schools across the country. Under the programme, each of the participating schools adopt its school program to reduce dropout rates with the aim creating a favorable environment for quality education and educational integration and support each child in discovering and developing his/her individual potential. The aim of the school programme is to coordinate all available resources and the three main variables in the educational process (students, parents and



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teachers). The activities are aimed also at regular school attendance, increased success of the (Roma) students, increased percentage of Roma children continuing their education in secondary schools (high schools) and having secondary education and encouraging the participation of Roma parents in school life and school governance structures.



Each school program within the "Each student will be excellent student" Program includes several basic elements:

- Introduction of EPA / ECA (other forms, as provided in the school) "Ethnic Folklore - Roma folklore" and other forms of intercultural education;
  - Activities for activating students: forming student parliament,
  - Activities to activate the students and work with students at risk of dropping out: introduction of the "students - mentors" practice;
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- Activities to engage parents: forming parent clubs and school parents;
  - Mechanisms for individual work with risk of dropping out: drafting a risk profile for potential dropouts, portfolio, individual consultations. These include: Prepare a list of names of class teachers who have students at risk of dropping out for a various reasons (children with difficulties in literacy, students whose parents are abroad, students in families where there are cases of early marriages, especially in some groups where there is still a high percentage of early marriages, etc.); Drawing up a personal profile of these students; Development of individual thematic plan and timetable to address the risk (designed in cooperation with student parliament and parent club)
  - Prepare a portfolio of these students
  - Exchange visits between schools.



Headmaster of the School welcomed the project team.

A team of students wearing traditional Bulgarian and Roma dressings, sang traditional songs and poems, while a student read a piece of writing on the importance of tolerance and acceptance of the “other”.

The second leg of the first day of the study visit involved travelled from Amalipe Center in Veliko Turnovo to “Bacho Kiro” Secondary School in Pavlikeni village. The teachers and the students of the school warmly welcomed the participants with a traditional custom and the



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Participants visited school classes and halls and discussed with teachers and students. Among others, the “open air class”, a place in the schoolyard which has been designed as a classroom under the trees impressed the participants.



Then, the project transnational meeting took place with the participation of all teachers of the school and some students. The partners presented the three national educational systems (Bulgaria, Romania, Greece) and they had the opportunity to discuss their differences and similarities, difficulties and the opportunities.



The three small scale pilot interventions were presented and partners exchange views and experience on their development in each country. Ialomita School Inspectors described the ways they worked so far on the three Romanian schools. They applied the practice, proposed by Greek partners and implemented by the school Agia Varvara, namely Δ-ROM-ΟΛΟΓΙΑ (Itineraries). The intervention was adapted to Romanian conditions with the objective to to promote good examples of tolerance and respect between

students, to highlight the cultural capital of Roma students featuring its different elements: language, religion, mores and customs, to ensure for students smooth and equal integration in the everyday school routine.

The teachers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gymnasium of Aghia Varvara inspired by the practices of “Bacho Kiro” Secondary School (Bulgaria) regarding parents meetings outside school, presented how they decided to implement an action in order to explore parents’ attitudes and perceptions to the responsibilities that arise from the obligation of their children to attend school as well as



parents’ involvement in the school life.

Finally, the teachers of the Bacho Kiro School presented to the partners the three actions taken by the school so far: a competition for the photo of tolerance, videos "Tolerance for me is ..." and the creation of literary essays on the topic. The participants watched the video on tolerance which aim was to make students think about tolerance in their own lives, to link their own experience with best practices from school and to establish a positive model of behavior. A key moment was the



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emotional experience associated with specific examples of school life.

Once the three small scale interventions will be completed, the results and the findings will be further analyzed in the Project best practices report and presented during the final conference of the project in Athens in December 2017.

The next day participants visited the Town Hall of Pavlikeni. The Mayor of the town warmly welcomed the participants and congratulated the Bacho Kiro School teachers for the contribution on Roma integration in education. The Mayor stated that *“education is the first step towards responsible citizens”*. *That is why we actively support and encourage any effort which focuses on children”*. Then, a local representative presented in detail the actions taken for Roma integration at local level *“with the hope that practices to be shared to other countries through project activities”*. As the Mayor said, the social services department consists of 85 employees and in all activities many Roma people and children take part.



The Municipality of Pavlikeni implements many actions on Roma inclusion. It approaches Roma inclusion as an integrated part of any policy implemented at local level. With the aim to be closer with Roma communities live in the area, the municipality employs two Roma mediators who act as the contact points between local authorities and Roma people. One of their tasks is to help parents and teachers to overcome any difficulties and overall to assist in any action related to Roma communities. Furthermore, the

Municipality implements a number of very interesting programmes for Roma people.

Among them is a programme which focuses on Roma parents and children self-esteem, a programme which aims at learning Roma culture, traditions and customs and at the same time support Roma people to develop social skills and encourage self expression. They have also organised “women’s discussion” for Roma women aged from 20 to 45 year-old as any opportunity to approach women and inform them on serious health diseases and preventative medicinal



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practices. In the field of employment, the Municipality in collaboration with the University of Veliko Turnovo has recently implemented two projects entitled “new opportunities for success” and “Me and the people around me” which encouraged discussions on employment, analysed the social security of Roma and provided vocational training for Roma people on sewing and other technical occupations. They also operate artistic clubs with the aim to increase Roma trust and develop interest in arts (music, dance etc). The municipality operates 19 clubs and in collaboration with the University of Fine arts implements various artistic actions, such as painting courses, dance, theater etc.

Ten Roma related stakeholders also participated in the meeting and they discussed and exchange views on issues related to Roma inclusive education with the Project representatives. The Mayor offered traditional handmade gifts to each participant. On the occasion of the opening of the ancient ceramic center of Pavlikeni and following the Mayor’s invitation, the study visit closed with the visit to the Ancient Ceramic Center.



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