

# Includ-EU

Regional and local expertise,  
exchange and engagement for  
enhanced social cohesion in Europe.



## Education



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# Introduction



## Includ-EU project description

The goal of Includ-EU is to contribute to building more inclusive and cohesive European societies by enhancing transnational knowledge sharing, cooperation, and partnerships between local and regional authorities in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain.

Includ-EU capitalizes on the diversity of local expertise and approaches as well as existing policy and practice in the field of integration. Funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union, the project focuses on:

- a) improving knowledge and capacities to facilitate the integration of Third Country Nationals (TCNs);
- b) implementing and assessing pilot projects that promote the integration of TCNs at the regional and local level;
- c) establishing an informal network of regions and local authorities with different levels of expertise.

## Aim of the briefing

One of Includ-EU's specific objectives is to enhance local and regional actors' knowledge and capacities to implement innovative integration measures, including through the analysis of existing good practices and the formulation of thematic policy recommendations.

In line with this, the aim of this briefing is to present the state of TCNs' education access and participation in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and Spain, focusing on possible implications for social inclusion. It also examines existing good practices contributing towards improving TCNs' access to education and issues recommendations on inclusive education policies in the EU.

This briefing is the result of the collaborative mapping of successful multi-stakeholder, multi-level, and public-private partnerships in different dimensions of TCNs' inclusion in the Includ-EU's target countries, in line with the new EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-27.

## Education access in the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion

At the end of 2020, the European Commission presented the new EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 (hereafter the Action Plan). While the responsibility for integration policies lies primarily with the Member States, the EU has established a large variety of measure to incentivise and support national, regional and local, authorities as well as civil society in their efforts to promote integration. The current action plan sets the EU's integration policy priorities, proposes concrete actions, provides guidance and delineates funding opportunities to translate policy into practice.

Access to and participation in formal education is a key factor contributing to integration and enabling all to thrive irrespective of their gender and background. For this reason, education is one of the policy priorities identified by the Action Plan, together with employment, health, and housing. Specifically, the Action Plan emphasises the need to ensure inclusive education and training from early childhood to higher education, particularly through faster recognition of qualifications, language learning, and greater access to online and digital tools. Making education more accessible is also a key objective of the Digital Education Plan (2021-2027), an EU policy initiative to support the transition and adaptation to digital training and education systems.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis and mapping that follow were undertaken before Russia's attack on Ukraine and the ensuing humanitarian emergency.

# Education: an empowerment right

Access to education is a **human right** and, as such, it should be upheld regardless of economic or legal status. Importantly, international law acknowledges that the value of participation in education goes beyond the strictly material learning aspect. Education, in fact, is an **empowerment right**, which enables all individuals to become active members of society and promotes mutual understanding and respect.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26.2) establishes that “[e]veryone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.” In addition, it “shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

The International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (Article 13.1) states that “education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”

More specifically, education is crucial to **empower marginalized adults, particularly women, and safeguard children** from the risks of exploitation. It also enables to develop one’s personality and abilities to **their full potential**, with cascading socio-economic benefits for all. In this respect, the Convention on the Rights to the Child (Article 28.1) states that the right of the child to education shall be achieved through compulsory primary education available for free and by making different forms of higher education accessible to all.

Addressing the educational needs of TCNs is also central to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 4 is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” This goal is closely interrelated with migration as a powerful driver of sustainable development for migrants and their communities. In fact, education can facilitate migrant children’s socio-economic integration and improve their livelihood as adults.

In accordance with international law, European Union (EU) law (Directive 2011/95/ EU, Art. 27.2) explicitly recognises access to education as **a right of adult beneficiaries of international protection**. Specifically, “Member States shall allow adults granted international protection access to the general education system, further training or retraining, under the same conditions as third country nationals legally resident.”

Through education, states invest in the potential of all persons living in their territory, including TCNs. In addition to being a precondition for greater social mobility, TCNs’ access to education **directly contributes to reviving their host societies’ economies**. Access to education, therefore, enriches receiving communities, fellow students, and society at large.

# Access to education and participation for TCNs in the EU

Human mobility is a defining feature of our societies. For this reason, making education systems more inclusive has become an essential goal for the EU and its Member States. The Europe 2020 Strategy recognises the role of higher education in delivering the EU agenda for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. The EU Commission's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion includes education and training amongst its core policy priorities. The 2018 Council Recommendation on Promoting Common Values, Inclusive Education and the European Dimension of Teaching stresses the importance of ensuring effective and equal access to quality education for all learners. In addition, as part of its supporting role in the area of education policy, the European Commission is a member of the Bologna Process, an intergovernmental cooperation of 48 countries, including all EU member states, to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and enhance access to higher education for under-represented groups.

While all national integration policies acknowledge the importance of education for TCNs' social inclusion, considerable gaps in policy implementation and access to education persist. The 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report shows that throughout the EHEA, participation and completion rates of students with a migrant background lag behind those of domestic students, whether or not they have recently arrived or belong to the group of first- or second-generation migrants (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2018).

Students with migrant background tend to face greater difficulties in education and lag behind their non-immigrant peers despite generally more positive attitudes towards learning (OECD, 2021b). More specifically, we can identify barriers to education access and barriers to participation in education. Barriers to access prevent TCNs from enrolling in formal education; obstacles to participation regard effective engagement in education, including its social aspects.

Barriers to education access and participation faced by TCN students in Includ-EU countries include:

- **challenges linked to language access and learning**, including low levels of proficiency in the host country's language, familiarity with local culture and education system;
- **socio-economic barriers**: lack of support networks, including parents or carers who speak the host country's language and can support the children's learning process; unaffordability of higher education or impossibility to combine work and study; stigmatization or discrimination;
- **mobility for migrants and children who are subject to relocation procedures and/or risk of segregation for families living in reception facilities or isolated areas, far from public or mixed schools**;
- **hurdles in recognition of qualifications that hamper learning continuity and make valuable skills go unrecognised in the host country**;
- **legal and policy requirements**: all EU member states except Greece have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), establishing a legal framework for the recognition of qualifications obtained in the home country. However, the LRC has not been fully implemented, especially with respect to the establishment of national legal frameworks and procedures to evaluate the qualifications of



international protection holders who cannot provide full proof of their prior studies. In addition, migrants' specific educational needs are often not consistently streamlined into national and local education policies.

Research has found that the older immigrant students upon arrival in the host country, the lower their score in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In addition, first- and second-generation immigrants are less likely to enter or graduate from tertiary education compared to their native-born peers (OECD, 2021b).

Whilst accessing education in the host country is a challenge for most migrants, young refugees face specific obstacles. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics, only 1 per cent of refugees have been able to enroll in higher education globally, compared to around 36 per cent of young people in the world and 40 per cent in the EU (IOM, 2019).

Barriers to education access deeply affect TCN students' learning, personal development, and employment prospects. Working to enhance their participation in education is fundamental to achieve their well-being and work towards social inclusion and cohesion.



## Impact of COVID-19 on access to education for TCNs

The COVID-19 healthcare emergency is having a far-reaching impact on access to education, particularly for people in disadvantaged social conditions, including TCN learners.

The pandemic has affected 1.5 billion students worldwide, including migrant and displaced learners (UNESCO, 2020). In all Includ-EU countries, schools faced intermittent closures and had to move activities online. This disrupted the students' learning process, with a disproportionate impact on marginalised children. Distant learning measures exacerbated existing inequalities in access to education, exposing TCN children to a high risk of educational and social exclusion.

First, TCN school-aged children often lack access to adequate **equipment and facilities** to attend classes remotely. While remote learning remains an important tool, it is not always a viable alternative for TCN students living in refugee reception facilities and those from lower-income households. According to the latest OECD data, students with immigrant parents are less likely than their peers with native-born parents to have access to a computer and an internet connection at home (OECD, 2020a). Students with immigrant parents are also more likely to lack a quiet place to study (OECD, 2020b). Moreover, financial difficulties worsened by the pandemic made the necessary technological equipment unaffordable for many TCN households.

Second, students from TCN households tend to **lack additional learning support at home**. TCN parents and carers have, on average, lower education and poorer socio-economic resources, a limited knowledge of the local language, and a lower understanding of the education system (OECD, 2020a). As a result, TCN students in remote learning often face additional difficulties compared to their peers with native-born parents. Relatedly, Includ-EU countries have reported difficulties of teachers in keeping in touch with TCN families during lockdowns and school closures.

The pandemic has a negative impact on **adult learning**, too. Although innovative tools and methodologies have been put in place, online learning has proved difficult for low-educated

TCNs, especially those beginning to learn the host country's language. Furthermore, the financial consequences of the healthcare emergency have resulted in reduced job security for TCNs, and, therefore, a higher chance of facing emotional, financial or practical problems that interfere with their ability to focus and learn.

Mobility restriction have also had an impact on **international students** in both origin and destination countries. According to OECD (2021a) data, the number of first permits issued to international students dropped significantly in 2020 due mobility restrictions. As for the situation of those stuck in destination countries, in Italy, for example, diaspora organizations had to support financially graduate and post-graduate students who lost their student jobs and were unable to leave the country because of mobility restrictions.

Education inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic are going to have **long-term consequences** on TCNs' integration and empowerment, including diminished quality of education, less job security, loss of diversity in schools and workplaces, increased chances of burn-outs, mental health problems, stress and dissatisfaction among students, poorer school performance, higher dropout rates (OECD, 2020a).

While the potential learning loss as such may be largely temporary, other elements associated with the absence of traditional schooling, such as lower educational aspirations, disengagement from the school system, social isolation and loneliness can have a long-term impact on TCN students' outcomes.

## Mitigation measures

Against this background, Includ-EU countries have attempted to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on TCNs' access to education.

Education institutions in all countries adapted quickly to the unprecedented situation and set up **online classes**. In Slovenia, for example, schools managed to adapt the learning process to the students' needs with different forms of individual and group support. Unfortunately, for the reasons explained above, remote learning continued not to be a viable option for less-advantaged students and their families.

In this respect, Italy promoted measures to **support families** in coping with the new arrangements and create conditions for better education outcomes despite confinement. These measures included vouchers for IT equipment, baby-sitting services or summer day-care programs, extra time off from work for one parent per household. However, these measures were limited in time and availability, and special leaves had negative repercussions on female employment. Similarly, in Spain, Autonomous Communities developed measures to mitigate the challenges posed by the pandemic which included hiring more professionals in areas such as education and public services, supporting to families for the purchase of PCs, and expanding health, education, and social services facilities.

Finally, it is also important to highlight that the collaboration between education institutions, civil society and the private sector allowed the implementation of projects and initiatives to mitigate the effects of the emergency on TCNs' access to education, some of which are presented in the next sections of this briefing.



## Response to the education crisis following influx of people fleeing Ukraine

Russia's attack on Ukraine has caused an **unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Europe**. To offer quick and effective protection to those fleeing Ukraine, the European Commission has urged the activation of the **Temporary Protection Directive**. Under the Directive, those eligible will receive immediate protection, including protection of residency rights, access to the labour market, access to housing, social welfare assistance, medical or other assistance, and means of subsistence. **All children fleeing the war in Ukraine will have full protection and access to education and healthcare**. Unaccompanied children and teenagers will also receive legal guardianship (European Commission, 2022).

The ongoing humanitarian crisis has resulted in an **education crisis**. States, local authorities, and non-governmental organizations need to coordinate their response to ensure **education continuity** and a **protective learning environment** to war-affected children. This also includes **assisting and integrating into national education systems both learners and teachers fleeing Ukraine**.

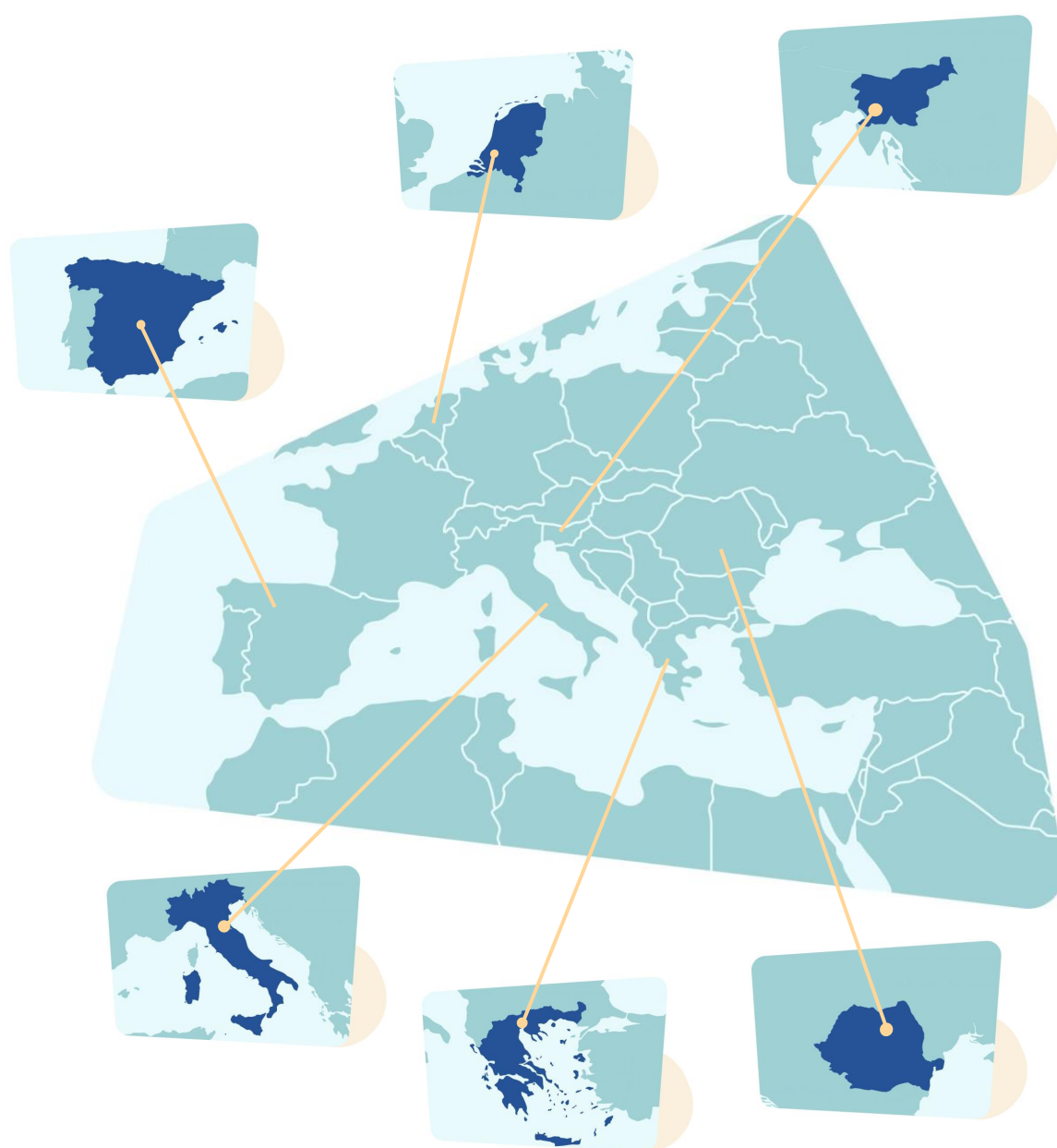
UNESCO has announced that support to learning continuity through its **Global Education Coalition**, created in 2020 in response to the challenges of distance learning during the **COVID-19 emergency** (UNESCO, 2022).

In addition, UNESCO is also mapping how countries in Europe and beyond are responding to the educational needs of Ukrainian refugees (UNESCO, 2022). The measures implemented so far include transitional measures, direct mainstreaming into national education systems, language and curriculum adaptation, psychological support, teacher training and accreditation, in addition to other actions taken to ensure registration, certification, and financial support (UNESCO, 2022).

Some initiatives have also included **distance learning options** in Ukrainian to support Ukrainian refugee students in the **transition to a different education and linguistic environment** (UNESCO, 2022), capitalizing on the tools and capacity **developed during the pandemic**.

# Access to Education in Includ-EU countries

Although Includ-EU countries face common challenges when it comes to ensuring TCNs' access to education, it is worth highlighting some important country-level specificities based on migration history, overall socio-economic features, and national welfare policies.



# Greece

The Greek legislative framework (Law 1566/1985, Law 2910/2001) guarantees access to mandatory education for all children aged 6-15 regardless of their parents' nationality and residence status. According to the last registered data of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), in the academic year 2018-2019, a total of 1.461.857 students were enrolled in the formal education system. Of these, 54.137 were TCNs and 28.696 were enrolled in primary school (ELSTAT, 2019).



The Greek educational scheme for refugee education is composed of reception and education facilities, called DYEP and located mostly in reception centres, reception classes (in school facilities), reinforcing coaching classes (in school facilities) (AIDA, 2021).

Although innovative measures have been taken to facilitate access to the Greek educational system, the attendance and performance of non-Greek speaking children is still hindered by several factors.

According to the March 2021 Greek Ombudsman's report on education integration, the number of children residing in the Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) and in the Facilities (camps) that are enrolled in schools is far from actual attendance, with an increased school dropout related to system malfunctions. These included the partial implementation of the DYEP programme, lack of teachers, transportation problems to reach schools, vaccinations shortages, administrative delays and COVID-related movement restrictions, as well as inadequate equipment for distance learning.

Additionally, a recent study has suggested that DYEP classes contribute to segregation and stigmatization rather than enabling educational integration of refugee students. Parents have also raised concerns about xenophobic attitudes and threatened to occupy schools (Simopoulos and Alexandridis, 2019).

Finally, TCNs in Greece face a significant lack of provision of pre-school education, upper secondary education, and vocational training.

# Italy



Article 34 of the Italian Constitution states that "schools are open to all" and recognizes the fundamental right to education. In accordance with Article 38 of the Consolidated Act on Immigration (TUI), education must be guaranteed to all TCNs present in Italy, including training, access to services and participation in school life; the same article also puts emphasis on the value of intercultural education, language differences, and mutual respect.

The Italian education system is characterized by a constant rise in the number of non-Italian students.

At the end of 2018, 9.7 per cent of students had a migration background.<sup>2</sup> However, TCNs' higher educational attainment is generally lower than that of nationals.<sup>3</sup> This gap is even wider between female TCNs and native women. TCNs are also more likely to be 'early leavers' compared to natives.<sup>4</sup>

To avoid segregation and favour inclusion, in Italy the presence of foreign students is limited to 30 per cent per class.<sup>5</sup>

In Italy, TCNs access to higher education is ensured by many stakeholders. The Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education rely on the expertise of the higher education sector when implementing programmes for this target group and fund the upscaling of existing best practices. Provincial Education Centres for Adults (CPIA) provide Italian language classes. CPIAs support social cohesion also through the collaboration with Employment Centres and other employment agencies, vocational training institutions and the Regions. Last but not least, the private sector plays a fundamental role in the education process and in job placement, by offering stages and apprenticeships.

Bureaucracy and long procedures are a huge burden for TCNs trying to access the Italian education system, particularly when it comes to the recognition of qualifications obtained outside the EU.

In addition to burdensome administrative procedures, linguistic barriers result in considerable difficulties in catching up with school requirements as well as early drop-outs. Linguistic barriers also affect TCN students' families, who often struggle to navigate the complex administrative procedures for school enrolment.

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<sup>2</sup> According to ANSUL (the National Register of Students and Graduates), this 9.7 per cent represents approximately 850,000 students with migratory background; 63 per cent of them are born in Italy (more than 10 per cent in nurseries and primary schools, 9.6 per cent in lower secondary/middle school, and 7.0 per cent in the upper secondary school/college).

<sup>3</sup> According to Eurostat data (2015-2016), on average, TCNs' higher educational attainment (ISCED 5-8) is lower than that of nationals. The gap between TCNs' and nationals' higher education achievement is present in Italy (1 per cent vs 4 per cent), and it is even wider among females (9 per cent vs 11 per cent). The gap widens with age: shares of TCNs between 30-34 years old with higher education are even lower compared to their native counterparts (Italy: 28 per cent vs 12 per cent).

<sup>4</sup> 24.3 per cent of TCNs vs 10.1 per cent of nationals aged 18-24 within the EU have achieved at lower education (ISCED 0-2) (Eurostat, 2015-2016).

<sup>5</sup> This limit was established by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) and does not apply in three cases: 1) when foreign students are already fluent in the Italian language (for example, for foreigners born in Italy or who have started their educational career in Italian schools); 2) when they are foreigners without an adequate knowledge of Italian who need specific assistance for reasons of educational continuity; 3) in the case of classes already formed in the past year.

According to the latest Report on foreign students in Italy (MIUR, 2019) more than 40 per cent of fourteen-year-old students with non-Italian citizenship are behind in terms of education.

The European indicator of Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) shows that foreign students are those at higher risk of dropping out, with a number equal to 32.8 per cent compared to a national average of 13.8 per cent (higher than the 2020 European target equal to 10 per cent) (MIUR, 2019).

Finally, also economic barriers need to be taken into consideration, especially when higher education is concerned: the costs of university (direct costs like university fees, accommodation, transport; and indirect costs like the fact that students do not normally work during their studies) are often unaffordable, especially for more vulnerable immigrant families.

Other barriers include the lack of family and friends support; a lower level of social capital; a personal but also a family gap between immigrants and Italian students (which are not only linked to the their parents' qualifications but also to their symbolic cultural capital); several language related issues and their symbolic implications. Nonetheless, despite the existence of these barriers, the presence of young immigrant students in Italian universities is increasing significantly.

# The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, education is compulsory for children aged five to 16, regardless of the child's immigration status.

Upon arrival in the Netherlands, younger children are commonly enrolled into public schools where it is assumed that they will learn Dutch quickly. Those in need of more focused attention may be enrolled in an international preparatory school focused on intensive language learning before joining a public school with other Dutch children.

Children who complete their education in the Netherlands until the age of 18 and receive a residence permit are generally exempt from the requirement of passing the state integration examination.

In 2018, a study found that 99 per cent of children who reside in asylum centres do attend school (Avance-Impact, 2018). In practice, though, asylum seekers tend to be relocated to different reception and asylum centres multiple times during their first years in the Netherlands. This can cause disruptions to a child's education, social network, and general integration progress.

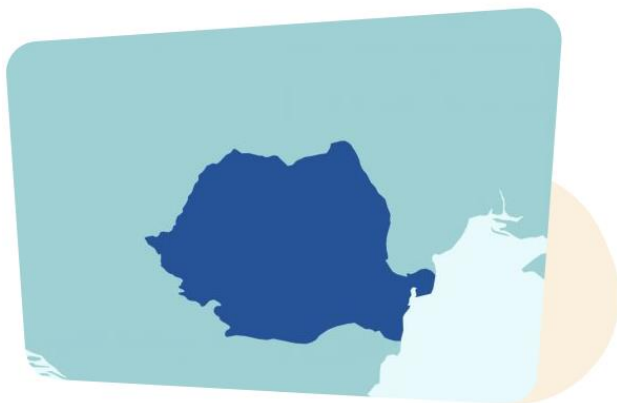
As far as adult education is concerned, the Dutch integration system allows residence permit holders to complete their studies while working in an effort to encourage sustainable self-sufficiency. Depending on the level of education, residence permit holders may be required to pass the Dutch integration exam before they commence their studies. As many universities in the Netherlands offer courses in English, migrants may not be required to have a certain level of Dutch to meet admission requirements.

In the case of resettled refugees, their ambition and capacity to study in the Netherlands is determined prior to arrival in order to facilitate admission to the appropriate educational institution. Administrative steps such as qualification validation, access to student financing, admission procedures and bridging classes can take months to process. Therefore, the sooner arrangements are made, the easier it is for refugees to commence or resume education upon arrival. Conversely, for asylum seekers over the age of 18, a residence permit is (almost always) required to formally enrol in education. Unlike resettlement caseloads which generally enjoy a quicker process, asylum seekers often have to wait months or years to secure their residence permit. Subsequently, they must go through the administrative steps of learning Dutch, validating their foreign qualifications, completing bridging courses, and meeting admissions criteria.





# Romania



Gaining access to education can be a serious challenge for people in Romania, especially for disadvantaged groups. Statistics show that the school enrolment ratio decreases as age increases. On average, 4 per cent of those who have the legal age to attend school do not do so, mostly because of poverty (Mosora and Mosora, 2013).

The national educational system includes authorized or certified public, private, and confessional education institutions. TCNs with a resident permit in Romania have unrestricted access to all schooling and

educational activities, including vocational training and scholarships.

County School Inspectorates organize Romanian language courses for all migrants legally residing in the country. At the end of the preparatory language course, a commission appointed by the Ministry of National Education evaluates the level achieved and issues a language certificate free of charge. The courses may also be organized by NGOs or other entities providing assistance to migrants (e.g. international organizations, universities).

International protection holders have access to all forms of education under the same conditions established by law for Romanian citizens.<sup>6</sup> If they register in the Integration Program coordinated by the General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII), they have access to Romanian language courses and orientation sessions.

The main challenges identified in accessing the educational system are burdensome bureaucratic procedures, language barriers, recognition of diplomas and/or learning certificates, lack of material resources, which is ever more relevant due to the COVID-19 pandemic, cultural differences.

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<sup>6</sup> Information is available on this official website <https://igi.mai.gov.ro/en/>.

# Slovenia

In Slovenia, all children, regardless of their migration status have the right to enrol in primary and secondary school under the same conditions as Slovenian citizens.

Slovenia has developed several key documents for the inclusion of migrant children through education. Among these, the *Guidelines for the integration of migrant children in kindergartens and schools* define an “inclusive approach towards the realization of the right to education of migrant children for their successful integration and contribution to an intercultural society”. The Kindergartens Act does not specifically mention TCNs, but states that preschool education should be conducted according to the principles of equal opportunity for all children and parents, taking into account differences among children, the right to choose, and the right to be different.<sup>7</sup>



Upon arriving in Slovenia, migrant children, in addition to the regular curriculum, can have access to additional language and learning support. The *Rules on norms and standards for the implementation of educational programmes* in secondary education (2010) establish the obligation for high schools to organize Slovene language courses funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. For high school students, language courses are offered only the first two years of their education in Slovenia.

As for asylum seekers and their access to education, according to the AIDA report, asylum seekers and children do not face considerable obstacles when accessing primary schools. However, asylum seekers rarely meet the formal criteria to enrol in high school. For this reason, in 2016, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education adopted the programme “*Literacy in Slovene for adult speakers of other languages with a contribution for asylum seeking children aged 15-18 years*” to promote their inclusion in school programmes for adults. According to MIPEx findings, migrant families and schools receive little support to promote social integration of migrant pupils (MIPEx, 2020).

The Slovenian educational system has developed numerous guidelines and tailor-made initiatives to address the barriers TCNs face in accessing education. While there are several good practices in place, the biggest challenges remain the lack of an integrated institutional approach, funding, and a diffusion of good practices throughout the country.

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<sup>7</sup> Article 3, Kindergartens Act, [www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO447](http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO447), unofficial EN translation: [www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/Dokumenti/Zakonodaja/EN/Kindergarten-act\\_ZVrt\\_EN\\_16-04-2019.pdf](http://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/Dokumenti/Zakonodaja/EN/Kindergarten-act_ZVrt_EN_16-04-2019.pdf)

# Spain



Education is recognised as a fundamental right by the Spanish constitution (Art. 27) and as constitutive to freedom, equality, and democracy.

Organic Law 2/2009 on the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social integration explicitly refers to access to education as part of “social integration of immigrants through transversal policies aimed at all citizens.” All foreigners under 18 have access to basic, free and compulsory education. In addition, any migrant resident in Spain has access “to the other post-

compulsory educational stages, to obtaining the corresponding qualifications, and to the public scholarship system under the same conditions as Spaniards.”

Education, as well as social policies, are competencies of the Autonomous Communities, which are responsible for their design, implementation and evaluation. Social organizations and the private sector, especially companies, also have a special role in ensuring access to education.

The latest data provided by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE) on education and migration date back to 2016. In primary and secondary education there were a total of 716,736 foreign students enrolled, which represented 16 per cent of the foreign population. In the same year, a survey on educational activities by the same organization showed that 3,241,404 foreigners in Spain declared to have carried out some educational activity in the last 12 years (INE, 2017).

# Promoting more inclusive education policies and practices for TCNs in Europe

Includ-EU countries have put in place a wide range of initiatives aimed at fostering TCNs' education access and participation. Measures include capacity building targeting teachers and school communities, additional language training, actions aimed at building reciprocal trust including mentorship and peer-to-peer support, skills development, and projects catering for specific learning needs. Importantly, each initiative gives a practical example of how it is possible to make positive strides towards more inclusive and diverse national education systems that benefit both TCN students and the society at large.

## 1. Intercultural capacity building and teacher training

While all Includ-EU countries have put in place measures to make mandatory education more inclusive, the on-the-ground reality shows that the full implementation of these measures proves to be a challenge. Teachers and school staff must grapple with limited specialised training and practical guidelines on how to manage intercultural communication and ensure that differences do not become sources of conflict. Educators also face various hurdles as they must learn to adapt to meet the psychosocial needs of children whose lives have been uprooted by situations of crisis while also ensuring that other students help create a welcoming classroom environment.

Responding to these challenges, Includ-EU countries have developed capacity building initiatives targeting teachers and school communities. Through these initiatives, teaching staff



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benefit from specific training on how to engage with students with culturally diverse backgrounds and help them develop their potential. School staff can be better equipped to serve the specific needs of TCN students by participating in professional development and training that can provide them with relevant skills and resources that can improve social connections in the school and tailor curriculum to account for TCN's learning needs. Importantly, these intercultural training initiatives benefit the whole school community and enhance long-term inclusion prospects by making an effort to diminish the effects that material difficulties or limited support networks have on TCNs' future opportunities.



## Good practices at a glance

### Schools for All – Creating inclusive schools through teacher training

*Implementing actor(s):* European Wergeland Center, Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Council of Europe.

Schools for All aims to ensure that Greek schools are inclusive and welcoming for all. Through this project, headmasters, teachers, and families receive specialised training to learn new ways to foster a stimulating and inclusive learning environment.

The training provides school staff and students' families with the tools, skills and confidence to manage conflicts and deal with intolerance, discrimination, racism and hate speech. Throughout the school year, school teams composed of school heads, teachers and parents' representatives are trained and mentored by experienced trainers. The whole school participates in workshops and other activities.


Importantly, the project targets the whole school community, and not just teaching staff. This feature contributes to the diffusion of knowledge and best practices across the school community. Through targeted capacity building, the project also contributes to break negative stereotypes affecting TCNs in the school environment.

The project Schools For All is implemented under the Local Development and Poverty Reduction programme by the European Wergeland Centre (EWC), under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and with the support of the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP).

### Responding to the “Challenges of Intercultural Coexistence” - Slovenia

*Implementing actor(s):* Institute for Psychological Counselling and Educational Development Projects (ISA Institute) and consortium of primary and secondary schools.

The goal of the project “Challenges of Intercultural Coexistence” is to improve the skills of education managers and professionals, ensuring that the Slovenian education system is inclusive and welcoming for children from different backgrounds. The project provides practical solutions to the need for a



systemic work programme for TCN children and the lack of regular monitoring of activities in the Slovenian education system.

Activities include school counselling services; intensive courses of Slovenian as a second language; workshops to improve the school climate; continuous education of expert practitioners – didactics, monitoring of the students’ knowledge and assessment methods.

Teachers act as focal points and are in charge of establishing networks with other parents and other local organizations. This is key to the success of the project, together with the tailored teaching methods and formal and informal education activities offered by the schools.



## Aula Intercultural – Diverse classrooms - Spain

*Implementing actor(s):* Trade union - UGT.

The Labour Trade Union UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores) decided to address the training needs of teachers in matters of migration and intercultural management to improve interactions with their students.

To this end, UGT has developed Intercultural Classroom, a platform on interculturality, with special emphasis on migration issues. The platform offers content on diversity management and interculturality in Spain, facilitates training activities for teachers, professors and educators, and promotes knowledge exchange within the education community.

The platform has more than one million users who visit the website annually and a newsletter with about 4,000 subscribers. Users come from Peru, Argentina and Mexico, in addition to Spain.

The project is financed by the General Directorate of Migration, Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration (MISSM) and co-financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). In addition to the UGT as implementing body, education centres, school boards, NGOs, and private actors also take part in training sessions, knowledge exchange, and dissemination activities.

Aula Intercultural has been successful in creating networks, encouraging participation from different countries, providing diverse perspectives on intercultural management, creating awareness, and detecting new education needs

## 2. Language



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TCNs come with a wealth of language abilities from their home countries. Despite this, a low level of proficiency in the host country's language and linguistic barriers continue to hamper equal access to education and subsequent training and employment opportunities. In addition to having short-term effect on learning, in fact, linguistic barriers are likely to have long-term consequences on TCNs' education and employment, with consequences for broader social inclusion and wellbeing.

For this reason, it is crucial to ensure that TCN students have access to adequate language training to prepare to enter the education system and the job market on equal terms with other peers in the host country. In addition, language learning programmes should build on TCNs' existing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in their native language(s) to then advance their language acquisition in the

new host country language.



### Good practices at a glance

#### Learning for integration - Learning Italian from day one - Italy

*Implementing actor(s):* Lombardy Region, in partnership with ANCI Lombardy and another 34 partners (CPIAs, municipalities, third sector organizations).

"Learning for integration" ("Conoscere per integrarsi") is a project developed in Lombardy, Italy, and financed by the 2014-2020 Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

Lombardy is the first Italian region by number of TCN residents, reception facilities, and diversity in terms of existing TCN communities. It is also one of the regions with the highest number of arrivals for family reunification. For these reasons, learning Italian as a foreign language is crucial for early inclusion at the local level.

Learning for Integration aims to promote TCNs inclusion through learning Italian as a second language. The activities target especially A1 and A2-level speakers and include additional Italian courses (organised by 19 CPIAs in Lombardy supported by the Regional School Office), support



services to facilitate attendance (e.g. baby-sitting, cultural mediation), training of school and public services officials.



## Pre-bachelor for refugees – Getting ready to study and work - the Netherlands

*Implementing actor(s):* UAF, Hogeschool Utrecht and AFAS

Pre-bachelor for refugees is a programme run by Hogeschool Utrecht (Tertiary learning institute of applied sciences) since 2016. In addition to academic classes, students receive Dutch language tuition and practical training on adapting to the Dutch university system. Soft skills and intercultural competencies are also built into the curriculum. A mentoring scheme matches participants with other students in their first, second or third year at the school to favour the development of personal social networks.

The language training provided within the programme fulfils the requirements of the mandatory integration exam to obtain Dutch citizenship. The course is intensive and cannot be combined with full-time employment. For this reason, students are allowed to retain social welfare benefits to meet living costs while studying.

The Pre-bachelor was developed through collaboration between Hogeschool Utrecht in Utrecht, Utrecht Municipality, AFAS Software foundation and the UAF. Beneficiaries of international protection are selected to take part in the programme by UAF, while the project is delivered by Hogeschool Utrecht.

The programme aims to provide a reliable and sustainable path to gain qualifications and successfully complete mandatory integration requirements.



## MyRO – Building a regional network for migrant integration - Romania

*Implementing actor(s):* The International Organization for Migration (IOM); Global Help Association, AIDRom – The Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania

The Regional network for migrant integration in Romania – MyRO aims to enable the socio-economic inclusion of beneficiaries of international protection and other TCNs residing in Region 6 (Giurgiu, Calarasi, Ialomita, Teleorman, Olt and Dolj) through needs-based integrated assistance.

The need for additional tools to support the learning process is the result of a need-assessment process conducted in the framework of other integration projects implemented by IOM and its partners in the past three years.



### 3. Building reciprocal trust

Initiatives that are directed solely at TCN students can run the risk of creating environments where TCNs become segregated, stigmatised, and isolated from the rest of the learning community. These unintended consequences have profound effects on TCNs' mental health and wellbeing. Ultimately, feelings of isolation also influence their school performance and their ability to thrive in the host country.

As an alternative, activities that facilitate reciprocal exchanges and trust are crucial to fostering greater social cohesion through education by being truly participatory and mutually beneficial, both for TCNs and local community members. The following projects take important steps towards facilitating meaningful social mixing among TCNs and host communities by showing how school communities can play a vital role in facilitating impactful encounters and knowledge exchange which allow for stronger positive social connections to develop over time. In particular, peer-to-peer support and mentoring initiatives are highlighted as meaningful ways of building mutual trust, avoiding stigmatisation, and ensuring a smoother integration experience.




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### Good practices at a glance

#### Mentorship II - Peer-to-peer support to start university life - Italy

*Implementing actor(s):* IOM, the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) and a network of 10 Italian universities (Università di Roma La Sapienza, Università degli Studi di Padova, Università di Napoli L'Orientale, Università di Pisa, Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro, Università degli Studi di Torino, Università di Milano Bicocca, Università degli Studi di Sassari, Università degli Studi di Palermo, Università della Calabria)



This project is inspired by the Student Refugee Program (SRP) promoted by WUSC in Canada. Following this example, IOM proposed a youth-led approach to social cohesion by promoting mentorship schemes in higher education institutions.<sup>8</sup>

Mentorship schemes are based on a peer-to-peer approach. Students act as 'mentors' and accompany other students with a migration background in their journey to becoming full members of the academic communities and the cities where they belong, as well as provide their international peers with administrative, academic and social support.

The aim of the initiative is to ensure greater institutional involvement, strengthen collaboration with universities, encourage the participation of young people and improve the communication process, encouraging a change in the common perception of migration.

Mentorship II is part of a dynamic national and regional framework where higher education institutions have made considerable efforts to welcome newcomers. Actions in this field include financial support, simplified admission procedures, recognition of qualifications, linguistic and psychological support.



## Refugees@campus - the Netherlands

Implementing actor(s): University Asylum Fund (UAF), 27 Dutch educational institutes

Refugees@campus (2016-2018) was a student mentoring initiative led by the UAF. Its aim was to give guidance to highly educated refugees during their studies at universities or higher education institutions.

In three years, the initiative paired almost 500 students with refugee or asylum background (mentees) with Dutch student mentors. Mentors were responsible to help mentees find their way around campus and practice Dutch. Mentees were expected to introduce their mentor to a new culture. The matching was coordinated by UAF and by the educational institution. Throughout the duration of the mentorship (6-9 months), project staff were available to answer questions or give guidance.

Refugees@campus proposed the following activities:

- social activities on and around campus to develop personal networks and peer-to-peer support;
- a training module on intercultural communication.

Between the summer of 2016 until 1 April 2018, 450 mentorships were initiated at 27 educational institutions in the Netherlands.

An internal evaluation by UAF showed that the initiative boosted the mentees' self-esteem and language skills. Mentors also indicated learning gains, especially with reference to coaching and intercultural communications/awareness.

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<sup>8</sup> The Italian Ministry of Interior sponsored a study visit to Canada held on 9-13 January 2017 where three municipalities exchanged integration practices with their Canadian counterparts.



## InterACT+ - Active participation and integration - Romania

Implementing actor(s): International Organization for Migration (IOM); AIDRom – The Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania; Schottener Foundation – Social Services

The goal of InterACT+ is to contribute to the socio-economic inclusion of international protection holders and other TCNs into Romanian society.

InterACT+ team organizes educational activities for migrants legally residing in Romania, both children and adults. Activities include, but are not limited to, Romanian language courses, orientation sessions, financial education, and school enrolment. Special emphasis is placed on the empowerment of migrant women, who also participate in group counselling and/or discussion sessions held by the counsellors.

The project adopts a community, participatory approach to inclusion and local development. In this respect, the support of volunteers and intercultural mediators proves extremely useful to build bridges between TCNs and their host community. These exchanges can also practically support the assessment of learning needs and the prioritization of local activities.

InterACT+ is implemented in close cooperation with the General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII) and is financed under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).



## Cultural mediation as a bridge between migrant families and schools in Novo mesto – Project developed within the Daily centre for children - Slovenia

Implementing actor(s): Association for developing voluntary work Novo mesto (DRPD)

Novo mesto's daily centre provides activities for children, including TCN children who represent the highest share of its users. The centre offers social and educational programmes for families, including Slovene language classes, as well as interpretation and cultural mediation services. In particular, the cultural mediation project focuses on bringing cultural mediators to local elementary schools.

In the past ten years, elementary schools in Slovenia have faced a significant increase in the number of Albanian-speaking pupils. Thanks to the presence of a cultural mediator, the learning process can better respond to the needs of these children, while, at the same time, addressing stereotypes and reducing tensions. Cultural mediation can also facilitate the inclusion process of TCN families in their new local communities.

The project is coordinated by DRPD and activities are carried out in five elementary schools in Novo mesto. Additionally, there is a close cooperation with the families of TCN children, and with the social and health institutions in Novo mesto.

The programme contributes to improving the children's school performance and experience. It also supports the teachers' work with this target group, building trust and cooperation with families. In addition, the program enables families to better understand the Slovene educational system and establish contacts with other parents.

## 4. Intercultural skills development



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Enabling TCN students and families to develop collateral intercultural skills to access education can improve their overall experience as well as their prospects in the host country. While administrative hurdles and new education systems prove challenging for newcomers, the following initiatives show how it is possible to empower prospective TCN students and their families through strengthening their intercultural skills and improving access to services in coordination with local service providers, institutions, and private organizations.



### Good practices at a glance


#### TEAMS (Tuscany Empowerment Actions for Migrant System) - Italy

*Implementing actor(s):* Education Department of the Ministry of Education in the Tuscany Region, in partnership with the Region of Tuscany and 7 schools

TEAMS (Tuscany Empowerment Actions for Migrant System) proposes an integrated system of actions to improve access to services for TCNs in Tuscany. It aims to foster integration through multiculturalism, equal opportunities, and inclusive socio-economic development.

One of actions focuses on school services and aims to promote the school achievements of young TCNs as well as the participation of their families. Building on previous projects (e.g. “Schools without Borders”), TEAMS’ general objectives include:

- ensuring a homogeneous and qualitatively adequate school offer in the region;
- supporting the process of school inclusion in coordination with local service providers;
- supporting school achievements and reducing dropout rates;
- facilitating exchange between families and with educational institutions;
- promoting an integrated system involving schools, families, local communities, entities and private social organizations;
- creating stimulating educational projects and concrete growth opportunities.




TEAMS' actions rely on a local governance framework involving local and private social institutions. It is based on co-planning, involving both beneficiaries and stakeholders. A technical working group is in charge of the overall implementation. Specifically, the high school ISIS A. Gramsci-JM Keynes of Prato activated a network of participating schools identified on the basis of specific criteria to coordinate and monitor the implementation of this set of activities. This network includes also youth and developed the action plan of the activities in the seven partner schools, including orientation programmes, summer workshops, support actions.



## Matching theory with practice at Livada Elementary School - Slovenia

*Implementing actor(s):* Elementary school Livada

The Livada Elementary School proposes pioneering and inclusive intercultural practices and educational approaches in Slovenia. In addition to preparatory classes, the Livada school has 'introductory' and 'continuation' courses, where children - in addition to learning Slovene - acquire practical skills that help their inclusion. Pupils can also receive additional individual and/or group support.



The project was initiated as a response to the need for additional Slovene language classes. It developed into an innovative teaching curriculum to respond to the challenges that TCN children face, such as social exclusion and difficulties in learning Slovene. The school developed a two-level model of enrolling migrant children (especially asylum-seeking children and children from a very diverse linguistic background), with the first phase focusing on language skills, then in the second phase, the pupil is gradually participating in regular classes while still provided with language support. Furthermore, the school strives to create a welcoming environment through various efforts.




## CaixaProinfancia programme - Spain

*Implementing actor(s):* Fundación CEPAIM – Fundación la Caixa

CaixaProinfancia offers educational support, school equipment, summer camps, educational workshops with families, child nutrition and hygiene support, purchase of glasses and hearing aids, as well as psychological support.

The goals of the programme are:

- 
- promote the development of skills of children and adolescents and their families that improve their processes of social integration and autonomy;
  - promote the social and educational development of childhood and adolescence in their family, school and social context;
  - develop and implement a comprehensive social and educational action model that contributes to improving the opportunities for social and educational development of children and their families;
  - contribute to raise awareness and mobilize society for the eradication of child poverty.



The CaixaProinfancia programme was established by Fundación la Caixa in collaboration with various Spanish universities. CaixaProinfancia seeks to reduce the rate of child poverty and social exclusion with the support of Fundación CEPAIM and other NGOs. The programme is present in the Spanish provinces of Seville, Murcia, Ciudad Real and Valencia. The project also has the collaboration of the municipalities.

The programme involves the participation of CaixaProinfancia (Fundación la Caixa), regional coordinators, NGOs, city councils, universities, and families.

## 5. Specific needs

Accessing an education and achieving strong learning outcomes does not always occur seamlessly for children living in disadvantaged conditions, lacking family support networks, or belonging to underrepresented groups.

As the following example suggests, data on dropouts and school attendance suggests that some groups of children, like unaccompanied minors living in reception facilities in Greece or Roma and Sinti children in the Netherlands, are in need of specific initiatives targeted at ensuring they have proper access to formal education.

Importantly, catering to TCN students' specific needs can be achieved by increasing the presence of underrepresented TCN groups among teaching staff/school boards and ensuring that national policy frameworks are evidence-based, accounting for truly existing needs.



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## Good practices at a glance

### Training on non-formal education for educators working in accommodation facilities for unaccompanied migrant children - Greece

*Implementing actor(s):* Unit for Integration and Support of Unaccompanied Minors-Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors- Greek Ministry of Migration & Asylum and ARSIS, ELIX, METADRASI, SOS villages, Sponsored Teachers (Ανάδοχοι Εκπαιδευτικοί)

Educators working in accommodation facilities for unaccompanied migrant children were invited to attend a six-month training. Each week an NGO with educational expertise and experience on teaching to TCN students was invited to hold a workshop.

The programme was initiated in response to a general lack of capacity and homogenous teaching methods in reception facilities, as well as difficulties in enrolling children in formal education.

As part of the training, educators working with unaccompanied migrant children were provided with tools to navigate enrollment procedures, homogenous learning material for non-formal education, student counselling methods, and platforms to exchange knowledge and information.


### Sinti and Roma working for inclusive education - the Netherlands

*Implementing actor(s):* Nederlands Instituut Sinti en Roma (NISR), KPC Groep, educational institutes (ROCs) and various municipalities

The project Sinti/Roma Educational Assistance in Primary Schools provided training to members of the Sinti and Roma community in the Netherlands to become teaching assistants. Between 2005 and 2010 eight female participants were trained at primary schools in various municipalities in Limburg and Noord-Brabant provinces.

This initiative was part of a larger governmental programme, which aimed to increase the attendance and participation rates of Roma and Sinti children in Dutch education. Participation and attendance rates of Roma and Sinti children are very low in Dutch education institutions. Such patterns are reinforced by a lack of minority representation in the staff and boards of schools, which creates a negative spiral of low representation of students. Roma and Sinti communities are largely underrepresented in all facets of Dutch society, and limited attention is granted to this issue in public policy.

This initiative aimed to increase participation and attendance rates and raise community awareness towards the values of education by training and guiding members of the community to become teacher assistants.



Participants followed a teacher training one day a week and completed a traineeship at a primary school attended by Roma or Sinti children. They then took a preparatory course and were matched with a mentor for the duration of the project. Once their training was completed, which lasted between three to five years depending on participants' prior experience, participants continued to receive guidance from external education experts and project managers (Timmermans, 2016).

Five out of eight of the participants finished the training which qualified them to start a job as a teaching assistant. Another impact of the project was that attendance and participation rates of Sinti and Roma pupils have increased in the participating provinces. In addition to their role as teaching assistants, the project's participants represent their community as positive role models for children and youth, in addition to increasing awareness of the importance of education within the larger community.



# Includ-EU's contribution to inclusive education

The pandemic exacerbated the risk of exclusion resulting in poor integration prospects for migrants who lack or have **limited digital skills**. Enabling them to strengthen these skills has become crucial for social cohesion and to ensure access to public services and education.

In cooperation with IOM Slovenia, the Adult Education Centre Jesenice will develop and implement a **tailored intercultural capacity building programme to enhance the digital skills of local migrant communities**. The project will also provide language training and practical advice on how to access local services.

Group activities, including workshops, leisure time activities, and individual counselling, will aim at enhancing the migrants' digital skills needed for their participation and inclusion. The project will also work on the use of digital services related to social security, healthcare, education, administrative matters etc. Additionally, throughout the programme, participants will have a chance to practice Slovenian and improve their language skills.

This pilot project has been designed in response to the growing need of the local migrant population to have access to additional language and IT classes. An ex-ante and ex-post digital skills assessment will provide key information on the actual training needs among the migrant population. Importantly, an assessment of this kind has not been conducted before at the local level in Slovenia. The pilot project will be particularly innovative insofar as it will provide an evidence-based response to the digital and language divide affecting newcomers.

To enhance the participation of migrants in the digital community and, at the same time, ensure the visibility of project activities, the stories of project participants will be shared on the project website

The project will therefore enhance the skills and capacities of local-level stakeholders and facilitate inclusion and cohesion, in line with IOM's Joint Global Initiative on Diversity, Inclusion and Social Cohesion (DISC Initiative).

# Conclusions

Education is a **universal human right** and a **precondition for empowerment**. Quality education generates far-reaching benefits as it allows students to develop resilience, prepares them to participate in dynamic societies, and encourages them to reach their full potential. If States want to progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," the particular educational needs of TCNs must be taken into account.

When TCNs and host community students are given the opportunity to equitably succeed in national education systems, societies become more cohesive, productive spaces that welcome greater acceptance and wellbeing for all.

While concrete steps have been taken to make education systems more inclusive, both **access to and participation in education and learning** prove challenging for TCNs living in Includ-EU countries. TCN learners – both children and adults – and their families face considerable challenges when seeking to participate in formal education, including cultural barriers, socio-economic difficulties, and administrative and legal hurdles.

To fully empower TCNs and benefit from cultural diversity, it is important to put in place measures that address the difficulties of immigrants and their children in relation to **in-person and distance learning**.

In this briefing, the overview of good practices on education access across Includ-EU target countries suggests the following policy priorities:

- ⇒ **strengthen intercultural teacher training and capacity building:** education access is not sufficient if it does not come with quality education that enables TCN students to develop their potential. For this reason, it is important to provide teachers and school boards with the necessary tools to meet their students' learning needs and aspirations, particularly in multicultural contexts;
- ⇒ **provide additional language training** to TCNs from an early stage to limit the long-term consequences of language level differences on their future education and employment opportunities, as well as on their wellbeing and participation in society;
- ⇒ **incentivise initiatives that foster participation and mutual trust:** while educational support targeting TCNs risks stigmatising and isolating them, participatory initiatives and peer-to-peer schemes foster greater trust and engagement in student life and cultural activities;
- ⇒ **provide opportunities to develop collateral intercultural skills that improve education access:** TCN students and their families can benefit from information and training on how to navigate new

education and administrative systems in coordination with local service providers and support networks;

- ⇒ **address specific education needs of disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of TCNs**, particularly unaccompanied minors, those living in isolated reception facilities or non-urban areas, and Sinti and Roma. To ensure that they have effective access to formal education, it is paramount to ensure that they are represented in the education system and that their effective learning conditions are accounted for in mainstream education policies;
- ⇒ **ensure continued learning for all children and learners through IT-training and the provision of digital equipment**: in order to support the transition and adaptation to digital training and education systems, it is paramount to ensure that all children and learners have access to adequate e-learning tools/devices as well as training activities to strengthen their IT skills.

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