ELECTRONIC GUIDE

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I. INTRODUCTION – PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT

A) BACKGROUND

More than 10 million Roma people live in the EU, making them the largest minority group in Europe. They are the most discriminated and socially excluded group, especially in accessing education, employment, healthcare and housing.

The lack of education among Roma is one of main causes of their current situation. Few Roma children and young people go to school and their educational performance is poor, which subsequently worsens their employment opportunities. Roma face serious constraints in access to education. This is evident in low educational enrolment rates for Roma children, while segregated schooling persists. Poverty and low income also undermine access to education. The shortage of economic capital among Roma communities hinders school attendance as parents lack the necessary financial resources to afford the costs of school material, clothing and food. Poor housing conditions also affect Roma children’s school attendance and performance as they face adverse geographical boundaries in accessing schools by living further away from schools. Special schooling remains a key aspect of Roma education. Roma children are often placed in ‘special schools’ for children with special needs where they follow simpler curricula than mainstream schools. In the case where Roma children are sent to regular schools they fail to receive the same quality education as the non-Roma children because of irregular attendance or insufficient support. Thus, this project was originated from the need to improve the educational level and life condition of the Roma. The key to reach these aims is to boost education participation for Roma children. This can be better achieved by raising awareness of the successful educational experiences in promoting Roma education.

The ROM-UP! project will offer concrete successful measures in order to ensure that all Roma children have access to quality education, ensuring primary school completion, reducing the number of early school leavers and promoting the access to the tertiary education.

B) AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The main goal of ROM-UP! is to create an International Romani Network aimed at raising awareness of the successful educational experiences that have already been scientifically proven to be effective in the promotion of the social integration of Roma children and all the students in general, in terms of pursuing educational success.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- Disseminate successful educational experiences in promoting Roma education;
- Develop strategies to carry out successful education participation for Roma children.
actions in the participating countries ((Spain, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Ireland);

- Involve Roma in the selection of good educational practices carried out in their communities;
- Establish networks of coordination between the coordination, Roma communities and education agents in order to overcome Roma educational exclusion.

**ROM-UP! project** will contribute to achieve the main goals expressed in the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, offering explicit, detailed and concrete successful educational measures in the education area to be transferred and implemented in different European contexts. This will involve a tangible improvement of Roma people’s life conditions, specially, the most vulnerable. The project will offer **concrete successful measures in order to ensure that all Roma children have access to quality education, ensuring primary school completion, reducing the number of early school leavers and promoting the access to the tertiary education.**

### C) INNOVATIVE CHARACTER

The main innovating elements of the project are:

1) **Romani network.** All actors involved in the Roma educational success will be included in the network. The network will make possible the transfer of knowledge regarding the successful educational experiences in Europe, which in turn will raise awareness and stronger commitment of all the relevant agents. This will be ensured by specific activities along the project.

2) **Its approach:** by changing from **best to successful** experiences as recommended in the Include-ED project, ROM-UP! will overcome the limitation of previous compilations which neither have evaluated the impact of the experiences proposed by them, nor have assured their success and transferability to other contexts. This change means a focus on those educational experiences scientifically proven to be successful (always and in all contexts). Additionally, such educational experiences have obtained successful results, are based on the international scientific community recommendations, and their implementation has been done through the dialogue and agreement with Roma community members. The ROM-UP! guide will inform about how to transfer them to other contexts.

3) **Roma direct participation** in all the relevant phases of the project including the direct voices in the main outputs.

4) The **direct connection with international scientific community recommendations** and INCLUD-ED contributions.

To find out the projects’ outputs please visit our website at [http://rom-up.eu/](http://rom-up.eu/).
D) HOW CAN THE WORK CONTINUE IN THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

During the discussions organized within the national working groups, the quality evaluation group, the European Advisory Council and between the partners of the consortium, the subject of the economic situation in different European countries was raised. Most importantly, we looked at how this situation is affecting the work that is being done in the field of Roma educational integration.

Due to the economic crisis, two variables showed up that hinder the adoption of successful educational experiences: the sharp increase in demand for education, from the part of Roma, and the simultaneous dramatic reduction in funds at public schools and in particular of deprived areas. At the same time, there is a setback in the perceptions and the tolerance of the majority groups towards specific social groups such as Roma, the reinforcement of stereotypes and racism and the increased competition for the share of the available scarce resources.

Additionally, firings and on-going restructurings by the state mechanism have created an unprecedented wave of insecurity and minimization of the interest of the professionals in education for undertaking initiatives or for being available to implement innovations.

One of the main contributions of the project is that the implementation of Successful Educational Experiences doesn’t need extra cost. They can be implemented only about rethinking the existing resources and by the commitment of all the community, educative actors and authorities. This is one of the main contributions of the project in terms of transferability of these successful actions in other countries and contexts, the fact that the majority of them don’t request more resources, it’s possible to implement them just rethinking the reorganization of the same resources that we have.

On the other side, another aspect emphasised by the quality evaluation group, the European Advisory Council and during the Final Conference is the necessity in the crisis context to implement experiences and actions that have been proved before to be successful and effective in order to improve the situation and inclusion of Roma children.

The project highlights the necessity to implement successful educational actions (with enough evidences of its successful before) to improve the situation of the Roma community in Europe and the commitment from the educative communities and authorities.
II. DESCRIPTION OF THE SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES SELECTED

ROM UP project is based on the Successful Educational Actions concept defined in the INCLUD-ED Project\(^1\). Successful Educational Actions are different from “good practices”. The main difference is that Successful Educational Actions are never based on assumptions, but in scientific evidences. These actions collect the main scientific community contributions in terms of how to reach educational success and social inclusion in all levels of compulsory education (early childhood, primary and secondary education, as well as VET and special education programmes), focusing on the most vulnerable social groups -such as women, young people, ethnic minorities or people with mental or physical disabilities- (INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2009)\(^2\). The Successful Educational Actions identified in the ROM UP! project are not only based on the contributions from the international scientific community but also in successful evidences to overcome school failure, early school leaving and Roma children dropout.

Starting from the communicative methodology, through which all people involved in the research project participate in an egalitarian dialogue, the Quality Evaluation Group (hereafter QEG), formed by academic and non-academic Roma and non-Roma people with different profiles -CSO participants, teachers, researchers- is aimed to assess the obtained results, reorienting them if necessary. Once the QEG was constituted, and all the educational experiences were submitted by partners in the consortium, the 22 experiences were classified, depending on whether they accomplish the criteria or not. The experiences were analysed, being identified the kind of actions that have been developed in each case. 6 types of Successful Educational Actions were identified that are developed through the 11 selected experiences.

After this step, more information was collected regarding each experience, in order to prepare the two European reports produced in the framework of the project:

\begin{itemize}
  \item The first report called “Successful educational experiences promoting the integration of Roma in & through education” presents in a detailed manner the methodology, the activities implemented and the results achieved.
  \item The second report called “The voices of the community” is a collection of testimonies from the beneficiaries of the project and the persons involved in the experiences, the voices of the main actors.
\end{itemize}


1. DECISIVE FAMILY/COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION – SPAIN, ROMANI ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN DROM KOTAR MESTIPEN

Summary
Decisive family and community participation is a Successful Educational Action implemented in Schools as Learning Communities in Spain. Learning Communities project is developed in more than 150 schools, from pre-school education to primary and secondary education and adult education. In those Schools as Learning Communities with high percentage or Roma students the educational success includes the reduction of drop-out and early school leaving being a success for all.

Decisive family and community participation to engage more representatives of the different groups in decision-making, thus implementing a form of democratic organization. This type of organization includes the voices of all participants in managing the centre; it draws on the idea of “cultural intelligence”. Families and other members of the community participate actively in decision-making processes; in cooperation with teachers, they decide on issues related to learning, the organisation or the school, and/or ways to resolve and prevent conflicts and organise school activities. Because of this approach, the value placed on the contributions of individuals is based not on the status position of the individuals, but on the arguments and contributions they provide; these arguments may come from a more academic or a more practical direction.

Two examples are the families’ assembly and the mixed committees. The Families’ assembly is an procedure well-established in one of the schools studied in Spain. This assembly was set up to decide on important issues, such as how to organize classroom interactions and how to deal with the increasing numbers of immigrant children attending the school. Families of various cultural backgrounds and levels of education (even some with no formal education), along with teachers and volunteers, agreed to implement the educational actions that would best respond to the students’ educational needs and requests. As a result of this assembly two decisions were made. First, all the pupils would remain within their classrooms, and would not be separated into different classrooms according to their learning level. Second, all the resources and support would be applied within the regular classroom; these include support teachers for children with special needs, along with volunteers and family members.

Results
- Increased participation of the parents and family representatives at the activities organized in school
- High percentages of children’s participation in activities related to helping students learning, either in the class or in afterschool activities
- The implication of the families and the whole community in the creation of the school rules
✓ Preventing and reducing conflicts and the improvement of the coexistence in the school, as well as increasing and the student's sense of responsibility, since the school rules were agreed upon along with the families
✓ Those families who participate most in decision-making processes have managed to decrease absenteeism of their children
✓ Improvement in the behaviour of the children has been noted in the classroom. Participation has enabled to increase and improve also relations between community members. This involvement also affects positively the resources the school has to improve the learning levels and living conditions of the whole community

<< Meetings are carried out firstly in order to make decisions and then a meeting is held in order to inform people about what was decided, it is not simply a case of holding the meeting and people saying they want this and that, and that’s it, no. Later the parents are informed of what was decided and the results of the previous meeting. (...) Everyone participates in all of the meetings here, everyone. >> (Mother, Mare de Déu School)

<< Of course, we have changed, some houses, some blocks of neighbours, some families who already work in volunteer bodies ... I think it had never been seen in this neighbourhood before, right? We have created a group of friends. I always say it. These are no longer volunteering mothers (...) There are mothers who spend more hours here than teachers. So no... I think it has improved a lot. >> (Mother, La Paz School)

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Summary
This action is being developed in the context of the Integrated Plan of the Roma People of Catalonia, are Roma students meetings organised by the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen. The goal is to increase the presence of Roma girls and women in training activities both encouraging young girls to stay in education through high school and university but also to promote training for adult Roma women. As it is presented here education is being a key element to increase their social participation, contributing to overcome the situation of social exclusion of the Roma community.

The women from the communities where the meeting is being held are directly involved in the preparation of the contents of the congress as well as on its dissemination with the support of the Drom Kotar Mestipen Association. A similar agenda is usually followed in these meetings, seeking a twofold goal: on the one hand, the presentation of experience of Roma girls and women who are studying at different levels and who are positive role models for the rest of the participants and, on the other hand, on the working groups with all participants to share experiences and concerns, and discuss different alternatives and proposals.

The target group of the project are Roma girls, young women, mothers and grandmothers traditionally excluded from opportunities for participation deciding on their education and future. The Roma students meetings are addressing Roma women, particularly those with no academic degrees, although the activity is open to all Roma women concerned with the education of their community. These events are organized in different neighbourhoods with a significant presence of Roma population.

Different critical issues for the Roma community are tackled in the context of these meetings: overcoming Roma school drop-out, increasing role models in schools and universities, (Drom Kotar Mestipen, 2007; 2008; 2009).

Results

✓ Thirteen meetings have been organised in different provinces in Catalonia witnessing an impressive increase in the numbers of participants, so the last edition gathered over 200 participants from different places in Catalonia (Drom Kotar Mestipen, 2009). This activity has proved to be very successful in involving Roma women without academic qualifications that are usually excluded from social participation

✓ The women become actively engaged in the organisation and development of this activity which has become an empowering tool that leads to their further social engagement in the Roma community, in their neighbourhood and schools
✓ Contributing to foster educational inclusion of Roma people in many different ways. To start with, they constitute a forum where Roma women exchange their experiences in the educational institutions of all levels and together look for possibilities on how to increase the educational success of Roma students, for example, by providing additional support and incorporating Roma people in the school which are role models for Roma girls and boys. Furthermore, these meetings have a strong impact on setting high educational expectations for Roma students and motivating Roma families and increasing their expectations.

<<I participated in the organization of the XII edition of the Roma Students Meetings held in Reus, in the neighbourhood of Sant Josep Obrer where I live. I decided to participate actively in the gathering and its organization more for the young people, so they do not remind going around all the time, not doing anything with their lives. I was involved in the organization, preparing, chairing the tables, organizing all the details, speaking with the Roma women of the neighbourhood, etc.>> (Loli Santiago, Roma women participating in XII Roma Students Meeting)

<< This space of Roma women dialogue is very good, I’m a father of two girls and I desire the best for them, they have to be trained and to be ready, and if it is possible to go to higher education. My dream is that my girls raise their voice and don’t have to shut up. >> (Father of one of Romani students who participated in Romani students meetings)

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3. **Family and Community Education – Spain, Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen**

**Summary**

It refers to the participation of parents and community members in learning activities offered at the school and addressed to them. In the following, the elements of participation that have contributed to the success of these types of participation as well as the improvements obtained are presented. In the first place, it is noteworthy that the activities of family and community education correspond to the demands of the families and the community members (literacy, numeracy, ICT, etc.).

The analysis demonstrates that the participation of family and community members in training activities improves children’s academic results. This improvement can be observed not only in the increase related to the acquisition of basic competence according to the curriculum but also as in the positive effect on other aspects, such as a reduction of absenteeism and an increase of the registration, as results from this research and which provide insight into the different mechanisms that promote this improvement.

Family education helps to bring educational practices in school closer to learning practices at home. Family and community education helps families to transmit a positive attitude towards learning, which then reflects in learning more and better and having more motivation to learn.

Family training also causes the rise of families’ expectations towards their children. By participating in family education, parents start to understand the education system as well as realise that they themselves can learn and interact with other social referents, and thus become aware that also their children can succeed in this educational system, which translates into holding greater expectations for their own children’s learning possibilities. At the same time, the fact of children observing their parents engaging in similar educational activities as they do improves their relation with their parents.

According to previous literature, family training enables parents to help their children in their learning process. According to the evidence collected, family training, which is designed democratically, allows improving the level of education of the parents. As a result, family education allows that families increase their skills for reading, writing and talking about school issues with their children, and hence, it promotes the increment of the academic interactions between children and their families.

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3 The evidences shown are the result of questionnaires answered by families and students from two case-study carried out in the INCLUDE-ED Project. These case-studies are the School as Learning Communities Mare de Déu de Montserrat and La Paz School, the first one located in the Autonomous region of Catalonia, and the second one in the Autonomous region of Castilla-La Mancha in Spain. Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities (CREA). 2011. REPORT 9: Contributions of local communities to social cohesion. INCLUDE-ED Project. Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education, 2006-2011. 6th Framework
Results
✓ Motivation of the families to be participants in their own learning and thus educators can understand and incorporate the needs of the participants into their classes
✓ Integrating parents’ wishes and proposals in the activities organized

<< It was a very big step as well, which went very well, the fact that they had someone (...) who looked after the baby sitting service while the mothers were studying, working... [...] And they want to continue next year. >>
(Mother, Mare de Déu School)

<< The family education in the school is... “a la carte”, in other words, in their dream the parents decided, they said, they expressed what they wanted, and which subjects they wanted to learn and we try to respond to that (...). >> (Teacher, Mare de Déu School)

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4. **Decreasing the drop-out rate among Roma children – BULGARIA, AMALIPE – CENTRE FOR INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE AND TOLERANCE**

**Summary**

The project "Decreasing the Dropout Rate of Roma Children from School" is a three-year program implemented by Center Amalipe – Bulgaria with grant support from "America for Bulgaria" Foundation. Its main target is to reduce the dropout rate of Roma children liable to school attendance. The project activities aim also at handling the issue of school absences, dissatisfactory school marks, the relatively low percentage of Roma who continue their education at secondary schools (high schools), the carelessness of Roma parents about school life and school management structures.

The project activities are initiated in concord with the principle that a well-functioning school is the best guarantee for the attracting, retention and success of students. It is also the best environment contributive to successful educational integration of Roma children. A well-organized school knows how to involve parents, has the resources to offer a wider range of educational opportunities outside the one-shift classroom and applies modern methods of teaching (including intercultural interactive education). The main concept of this project is that dropout is pedagogical issue and educational resources are necessary to overcome it: social activities are not self-sufficient but rather complementary solution in this case. A change in the overall school environment is necessary: changes in teaching methods applied in curricula, organization of the learning process with parent participation. Interactive and intercultural education is the best basis for mastering the dropout issue: an example in this respect is the case of the schools teaching the non-compulsory subject 'Ethnic Folklore – Roma Folklore'.

In 2010/2011 school year Center Amalipe gained experience in terms of co-work with schools, totally 34 schools in 10 regions of Bulgaria, 13 of them were 'mentoring' and 21 'pilot' schools. One of the main approaches applied in the program is the division of schools into two sub-categories mentioned above. In this respect, mentoring school is the school which has gained certain amount of experience and is successful in its efforts to attract and retain Roma children in school and pilot school is a school which is supported by the mentoring in the development and implementation of its dropout prevention program. In the second project year, 2011/2012, Center Amalipe introduced the “Program for Reduction of the Dropout Rate of Roma Children” in 90 schools (34 'mentoring' and 56 'pilot' schools) in 20 regions of Bulgaria.

The methods applied together with pilot schools to achieve these results proved in the long run effective. The school programs for dropout prevention and student retention is an essential tool for planning activities targeted at keeping students in school. Each school identifies initially its specific objectives and target group, then the specific activities targeted at retaining and attracting the children depending on the specific problems it faces.

**Results**
The dropout rate at the end of the first term was 0.58%, while at the end of the second term 0.38% compared to 2.47 % average dropout rate in the project schools in 2009/2010 school year.

924 students participated in the Roma SIP classes divided into 52 groups

The average number of absences (including all absences, excused and unexcused) in the project school during school year 2010/2011 has dropped to 40.66 absences per student compared to 110 which is the critical line accepted by the Ministry of Education as an indicator for a student in risk of dropping-out.

<< I was very skeptical about the peer-trainings at first, because I thought all schools have different problems and I didn’t believe that other teachers had the same issues and managed to overcome them. This method is a very successful one; I can see the results now. I recommend these trainings to other teachers. Please, do not hesitate to ask for help, if you need it! >>
(Teacher from “Bacho Kiro” Primary school, town of Letnitsa, Lovech District)

<< I’m a little Roma girl, living in a small village among Roma and Bulgarians. People are very good and all are friendly to me. The best thing is that I have a family, because there are many orphans who live poorly ... I want to study and my parents want it, too. This is my dream, every child, regardless of his origin, a Bulgarian, Roma or Turkish, has dreams for the future. My dream is to become a hairstylist, to be good at my profession, and to have many clients. I think anyone who wants to achieve his dream can do it in Bulgaria as long as he wants and has a strong will to do it! >>

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Summary
The inclusion of Roma culture classes into the curriculum of state schools in Bulgaria is a program which has been established and developed by Center Amalipe (Bulgaria) since 2002. The core of the program is the introducing of the subject “Folklore of the ethnoi in Bulgaria - Roma Folklore” (Roma culture classes). It is an elective course included in the curriculum of state schools. The classes are divided according to the age differences into 2nd to 4th grade and 5th to 8th grade.

The aims of the program are:

1. Preventing the dropout of Roma children by bringing the school close to the Roma family (through including elements of Roma culture in school curriculum)
2. Strengthening the identity of Roma children and raising their motivation for higher school achievements
3. Making children of non-Roma origin familiar with Roma culture and thus help them overcome prejudices and accept Roma kids.

The Roma culture subject is being taught not only to Roma, but also to Bulgarian and Turkish children. The subject is taught in Bulgarian, the learning aids published illustrate the variety of Roma folklore, its relations to the folklore of other ethnicities in the context of the Bulgarian national culture. For the purpose, a complete set of methodological aids (textbooks, workbooks, teacher's books, interactive audio and video materials) is published which have been dispatched to schools teaching this subject free of charge.

The basic approach of the program is the belief that each student is good at something. This can be a field from the curriculum or to remain outside it. The idea of what a student is good at may often be different from what we imagine as “good at. ... “. A student may be good at math, but another may be good at being a leader and to organize others, or being good at navigating in the woods, or a good musician, etc. The major focus of action is Roma community in general and specifically Roma children. Roma children drop out of school in high numbers. According to a survey carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science Roma children compose 21 % of the students at first grade and only 7,8 % at 8th grade. This means that two thirds of Roma children who attend 1st grade drop-out without obtaining any educational degree. This affects their chance for success later in life.

In addition, many Roma children have relatively low school grades and meet serious educational difficulties at school. Infrequent attendance and many absences (неизвинени отсъствия) often characterize the presence of Roma in primary and junior high schools. These foster additionally the dropout process among them.
Results

✓ At present more than 230 schools in Bulgaria have introduced these classes including more than 5000 students.
✓ Introducing minority (Romani) culture and traditions in the curriculum of state schools through the subject “Folklore of the ethnoi in Bulgaria – Roma folklore”
✓ A mechanism for raising Romani children interest and engagement towards schooling through recognizing their own traditions in the school issues.
✓ A mechanism for awakening parents (community) engagement with the school

<< The number of absences is much lower in the days when Roma folklore class is studied. Gradually this influences the other subjects as well.>> (School principal, “P.Hilendarski” school, village of Harsovo, Razgrad District)

<< My dream now is to become a teacher. I like this profession very much. The teacher is the person who shows the right way to the children. She gives them knowledge that everybody needs in order to succeed in life. The profession of the teacher is very responsible and serious – the teacher is always an example to be followed. >> (a student in the 4th grade of Hristo Botev Primary School, Tarnava village, Vratsa district)

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Summary
This action was developed during the operation of Socio-Medical centre (Roma Support Office) in Aliveri of Nea Ionia in Volos, and has been providing services to Roma residents since 1998. The activity was initially funded by the Community Initiative Integra, programme Multi Roma Action Hellas (1998-2001), the Greek Ministry of Interior under the National Plan for Romas in Greece (2000-2004), the Greek Operational Programme of the third community support framework with 75% co-financing from the ESF (2005-2009) and by national funding combined with resources of local authorities until today (2009-2012). For the period 2012-2014 the programme is co-financed from the Greek NSRF.

- These “Social and Medical centres for Romas” aim at social integration at local level based upon a local action plan for Romas
- Their methodology is the holistic approach (education-employment-health-housing-free time activities, civil & civic rights). They are focused on women & children.
- The development of several actions was based on quantitative research to identify the needs of residents in conjunction with methods of qualitative analysis type Spiral\(^ {1}\).
- Our main idea is that women are a key player towards the economic and the educational transformation of the area.

In Aliveri of Nea Ionia Volos reside permanently or temporarily over 1,225 people of Roma origin (data 2010, KEKPA-DIEK). This neighbourhood has the characteristics of an isolated and bounded area by a railway line, the torrent Xirias and a regional road linking Nea Ionia district to the Melissiatika area. In Aliveri, when we started working in 1998 most of the children (over than 80%) didn’t go to school and women were too busy with the households or helping their husbands at work to deal with their children. In addition, education was not a value for families (according to previous researches -1998- more than half of the population was illiterate or functionally illiterate). This is the reason why we started actions to promote the education as a value among the residents and school enrolling for kids.

Efforts to change the situation in education started from the very beginning (1998 and more intensively after 2000). With time we realized that these efforts were “blocked” by children’s parents due to lack of respect for education as a value in the community. Consequently, we had to approach these members of the family who were closer to the children and could influence their educational status: their mothers and grandmothers. So, we decided to change this situation by intervening both to women & children.

Results
- Children enrolments are doubled since 2006 and the drop-out percentage dropped around to 10% from 40% (their children go to the nearby public school). Also, around 4-5 children

\(^ {1}\) Website of the Council of Europe, SPIRAL (Societal Progress Indicators and Responsibilities for ALL), https://spiral.cws.coe.int/tiki-index.php
attend kindergarten every year for the first time and the same number goes for secondary school too.

✓ Interest for their own education as well as for employment has risen too: so far, 20 women have been trained to establish their own enterprises and 31 more have been taught Greek language lessons. 5 women took degree of elementary education, 5 teenage girls took certifications of attending these classes and 1 of them continued to secondary school. It is also worth saying the fact that slowly some men expressed their will to attend classes: 9 men attended Greek language lessons and 2 more took degree of compulsory education.

✓ 1 woman from the community worked as a cleaner in the courses and 1 more worked as a mediator. Additionally, 2 more worked as street cleaners in the municipality of Volos and 3 women decides to take subsidies to start up their own SME.

<< We kept mentioning things we liked and Eirini noted them on the blackboard...Greek lessons, excursions, beauty and health discussions, handicrafts etc. I really enjoyed the teamwork, all the laughing there...>> Sabani Magdalini (member of the Women's Place).

<< I wanted to learn Greek, to make my life easier especially with the public services, to be able to communicate better with Greek people...>> Kolonia Stavroula (core-member of the Women's Place)

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Summary
Interactive Groups is a Successful Educational Action which is carried out in ever more schools. This action is developed in School as Learning Communities. Interactive Groups are achieving educative success among all children, including those for the most vulnerable groups such as Roma children. Interactive groups are a form of classrooms organization that promotes both increased academic results and better social cohesion. It consists of grouping students in small heterogeneous groups (in terms of gender, culture, academic attainment, special needs, etc.) and incorporating into the classroom human resources that already exist in the school and in the community but that are in many cases misused. This resource means families, volunteers, support teachers, etc. Several activities are proposed by the teacher and every small group work on them with the help of a family member or a volunteer who become part of the group. This additional adult in each group has the function of motivating learning interactions among students.

Interactive groups entail organising the classroom into small heterogeneous groups of pupils (e.g. four groups of five pupils) and including several adults, one per group. Each group works on an activity involving instrumental learning for a period of time (e.g. 20 minutes). Then, the groups rotate and work on a different activity with a different adult. These adults are other teachers, family members, volunteers from the community, and other volunteers; they are in charge of fostering interactions among the children to solve the assigned tasks, and they also expose them to a wider and richer range of learning interactions. In interactive groups children learn in interaction with their peers, who are of various levels of ability, some of them academically stronger. The groups provide more opportunities for mutual help among children with different learning levels and paces, as well as with a wide range of diverse adults. Ania Ballesteros, a 10-year-old pupil from one of the successful low-SES schools, described her experience at the INCLUD-ED Final Conference: “Without interactive groups, some children would have fallen behind”. Instead, in interactive groups, academically strong pupils become a resource to help the others. At the same time, this approach guarantees that the higher performers do not wait for the rest to catch up, and they reinforce their meta-cognitive abilities while they explain to the others how to solve the task. Increased interactions accelerate learning for all the pupils and promote solidarity among classmates.

Interactive Groups is a Successful Educational Action which is carried out in ever more schools. This action is being developed in School as Learning Communities. There are more than 150 School as Learning Communities in Spain. Interactive Groups are achieving educative success among all children, including those for the most vulnerable groups such as Roma children.
Results

✓ In one of the studied schools (Montserrat, Terrassa), for example, in the period between 2001 and 2007, the proportion of students who achieved basic competence in reading comprehension rose from 17% to 85%; in the same period the number of students of migrant origin rose from 12% to 46%. These results make it possible to overcome long-standing assumptions that explain a particular school’s results based on the composition of its student body. The neighbourhood of Montserrat where the school is placed has a high level of Roma population. This neighbourhood has low income and underprivileged social and economic conditions. All the Roma children of the neighbourhood attend the school.

✓ Interactive Groups **encourages peers to help each other** and, as students are heterogeneous as regards their level of attainment, learning improves.

✓ **The incorporation of families into the classroom contributes to an improvement in coexistence and better behaviour.** The students behave better and concentrate on learning activities when their relatives or other children’s relatives are present. Both family members and teachers have identified this improvement. This is the case of an illiterate mother from La Paz school, who observes that when she participates in the classroom the student’s behaviour improves.

"Before I come in they are making such a racket which is too much, eh? And one of the little girls says, “Juan’s mummy is here” and they sit down. [And I say] “Well come one everyone calm down and you’ll see what happens [if not] eh! You’ll see!” and all of the kids sit there to do what the teacher says and everything goes well, and the teacher is there with them [and the teacher said] " if I hadn’t seen this with my own eyes I wouldn’t have believed it” and she also said “when are you next coming?” >> (Mother, La Paz School).

"Those who help definitely learn as well. Let’s see, if a boy has to explain a problem to his classmate (...) when he explains it he has to go through a small reflection process in his head, lower his level of understanding let’s say and then communicate it verbally to his classmates so that they can understand it. Therefore this is a reasoning process which he goes through and **which really helps him to learn more and really become aware of what he knows**, you see? >> (Teacher, Mare de Déu school)

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8. **Dialogic Literary Gatherings - Spain, Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities of the University of Barcelona**

**Summary**
Gatherings are organized in schools other organizations with mothers, fathers, other members of the community and children. At these sessions, people share the reading of classic works of literature, from writers such as Kafka, Joyce, Dostoyevsky, García Lorca, and Cervantes. Through engaging in dialogue about the literature, participants deepen their understanding of language and engage in debates based on their own life experience. It is ultimately a very empowering experience.

In the Gatherings, participants choose the classic work of literature they want to read and how many pages they are going to read in each session. Participants read the agreed pages at home and choose a paragraph they want to share with the others. Once together in the Gathering, people who have chosen a paragraph make a request to take the floor to the moderator. It is the moderator who gives the floor. Then the person reads his paragraph and explains why he has chosen it. Then, the floor is open to those people who want to give their opinion about the same paragraph, and the process goes on till the end of the paragraphs.

Gatherings are organized in schools with mothers, fathers, and other members of the community. Dialogic literary gatherings are aimed at adults who do not have a university-level education. Anyone interested can attend; it constitutes a way not simply to learn, but also to open the school to the community. Dialogic literary gatherings are also conducted with children, as an after-school activity or as a part of the regular curriculum. Dialogic literary gatherings are held in those schools that have become Learning Communities and other organizations of adult education. Las sesiones de las tertulias es una vez por semana.

At these sessions, people share the reading of classic works of literature, from writers such as Kafka, Joyce, Dostoyevsky, García Lorca, and Cervantes. Through engaging in dialogue about the literature, participants deepen their understanding of language and engage in debates based on their own life experience. It is ultimately a very empowering experience.

**Results**
- The creation of opportunities in which children and their relatives can share their knowledge and work together at home thus improving their motivation and academic competences.
- Due to family and community education the opportunities families have to be able to help their children with their homework have increased, and this contributes to their academic attainment.
Increased learning interactions and learning contexts have lead to **increased expectations of children's academic possibilities.**

Families’ participation has lead in occasions to increasing **family participation in other activities in the school** as a result of knowing better the school and the opportunity for participating they have there.

Female participants in family education courses become the protagonists of their own progress and increase their self-esteem.

<< Well, it has an impact on them understanding how things work in the school. This means that more parents then collaborate (...). Once they see how it works, well the parents become more involved and they are more aware because sometimes people do not collaborate because they are unaware of how it works and so then they just give up. >> (Teacher, Mare de Déu School)

<< Since there are classes this means that parents open up their expectations for their children a little bit, perhaps they used to say that well, fourth or sixth year of secondary school was as far as their children could go and now they talk about university (...) It used to shock me a lot when I arrived, that the children when they were 14 would immediately talk about the fact that when they were 15 or 16 they would already start working, but now they say, I want to be a vet, I want to go to university.>> (Teacher, Mare de Déu School)

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Summary
The RoFal project is a Comenius Regio project funded by the European Union. The project looked at encouraging parental involvement in children's education through supporting families to help their children learn, increasing parent and child interaction time on literacy based activities and supporting parents own numeracy and literacy needs. Over the course of two years the project supported more than 55 parents to engage in Family Learning Classes. The project targeted the Roma community in Ennis, Co. Clare. The Roma Community in Ennis is estimated to be around 300 including children. Clare Family Learning Project worked in partnership with many agencies to maximise the use of resources and the ability to reach parents in the Clare region. A number of statutory and non-statutory agencies were closely involved in the project; Ennis Educate Together National School, the Home School Community Liaison teacher; the School Completion Project in Ennis Community College and Clare Immigrant Support Centre all of whom work closely with the Roma Community in the area. The project was managed and implemented through the Clare Family Learning Project, which hosted monthly meetings of the project in Ennis. Their international partner organisation was Aydin Il Milli Egitim Mudurlugu in the Aydin Provence, Turkey.

The main objectives of the project were:
- To increase the integration of a minority community (Roma) in the education and schooling of their children
- To promote cooperative activities between local and regional authorities in partner countries
- To support families to help their children learn
- To increase parent and child interaction time on literacy based activities
- To support parents own literacy and numeracy needs
- To encourage the notion of lifelong learning.

There were issues with absenteeism among Roma children in primary classes; it was felt that an initiative which developed parental involvement in the school might work to combat this. A 16 hour, 8 week programme of Family Learning Classes was developed. Classes were arranged at convenient times and locations for local Roma parents. As part of the classes, childcare facilities were provided. Initially a questionnaire which was translated into Czech was distributed to families to gauge what subject areas parents would be interested in attending classes on.

Results
- 55 parents involved in Family Learning Classes
- 100% transfer of Roma children from primary to second level education.
- 31 respondents to questionnaire on educational needs and background
Development and dissemination of brochure outlining key points about starting school in Ireland, ways to support children and how the school system works.

Parents attending mainstream classes in the adult education centre

- Significant increase in the number of parents attending adult education
- Significant increase in school attendance
- Establishment of network of agencies from the local area working collaboratively on issues affecting Roma families.
- At the end of the project parents were significantly more comfortable in their children’s school environment. Parents were engaging with staff and local authorities on a range of issues.

**How have family learning classes impacted on my family?**

<< I like the class as the children have something to be interested in and they meet other kids as well. It brings them happiness. >>

<< Children have fun. Classes help children and support them. >>

<< I liked playing games with kids. I feel better after the classes. >>

<< It’s better if it’s twice a week. Yes, I liked it was good help for us. Yes, I was very happy with this programme. >>

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Summary
The first step of the program was the selection of a community to implement an intensive pilot training program for children. Two criteria were used to choose the location: the existence of a Roma community facing school dropout and difficult adaptation of Roma children to school demands; and the genuine interest of local authorities in the success of the program, indicated by their direct involvement in the activities. After the location was selected, a feasibility study based on a questionnaire was conducted in the Roma community in order to respond to the real needs of the community.

The next stage of the program consisted of the organization of a training seminar for the project’s teaching staff. The training emphasized the importance of adapting the educational content to the children’s characteristics (age, family environment, characteristics of the community); valuing the motivational and intellectual potential of the children; and using a teaching strategy based on games to increase the accessibility of the actions.

Based on the experience of this pilot program, the subsequent projects on early education created and implemented by Romani CRISS included an intercultural dimension. Thus, in 2006, 2007, and 2008 Romani CRISS organized summer kindergartens for children who were about to enrol in elementary school. The activities aimed to undermine the cultural and ethnic stereotypes, promote cross-cultural dialogue and exchange of experiences among the participants, help participants assume their collective identity, and make them aware of the richness of Roma traditions. Besides that, Romani CRISS organized intercultural activities in regular kindergartens with an ethnically mixed population of students. The activities focused on expressing artistic skills (painting, moulding, doll making, and acting) and acquiring information regarding Roma history and traditions.

Kindergartens provide children with the necessary abilities for a successful integration into the primary school. During the program, participants improved their oral communication skills, made use of their imagination and creativity, and acquired basic math knowledge. Therefore, we believe that making kindergartens available to children from disadvantaged groups might increase their school participation and their ability to be competitive.

Within the project were included a number of 30 Roma children aged 6-12 who either haven't attended kindergarten or primary school, or faced academic failure or dropout from school from Panciu locality, county of Vrancea in Romania. The program “A Good Start in School” intended to improve the adaptability and school performance of Roma children from Panciu, Vrancea County. It was a joint initiative of UNICEF, the Romanian Ministry of Education, and the Roma Centre for Social Intervention and Studies (Romani CRISS) that tried to address the problem of high school dropout rates among Roma children.
Results

✔ Intensive training of Roma children organized in August, 2001. The average daily duration of activities steadily increased from 4 hours a day in the first week, to 5 hours in the second week, and 6 hours in the third week.

✔ Training for enrolment in the elementary school on topics such as: language development, mathematical skills, environmental knowledge, games and creative activities, civic education, artistic activities, physical education, music, and dance.

✔ Foundation of an Educational Support Centre that provided children with additional after-school support. At the Educational Support Centre, children could do the homework for the next day, prepare for classes, and receive help whenever it was needed.

✔ Organizing a training session for the teaching staff.

✔ A percentage of 56% of the children who promoted to the next level of studies.

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Summary

“A Good Start” project was funded by the European Union. It supported more than 4,000 children from ages zero to six to access early childhood education and care services in 16 locations across four countries (Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia). Although the project mainly targets Roma it also supports non-Roma children and families. A Good Start’s partner non-governmental organizations work with national and local governments in the different locations to build sustainable partnerships able to increase and improve the range of services provided to young children over time.

The main objectives of the project were to increase the access of Roma and non-Roma children to early childhood education quality services and to improve the results of the early development and preparing the children for school and furthermore, for life opportunities.

In Romania, the project was implemented in Mofleni, a community situated at the margins of one of the neighbourhoods of Craiova, Dolj County where a number of almost 100 children up to 6 years old live that speak Romani at home.

“A Good Start” project in Mofleni had two approaches, an institutional one and another one centred to the community. For the institutional approach, a series of activities were implemented, activities aiming to raise awareness of the authorities regarding the importance of education and the situation of the Roma children from Craiova. Another issue addressed was the one of interculturality in the kindergarten from Mofleni, Craiova, which was included in the project; the activities developed came to support the kindergarten from the community and to raise awareness of the teachers working there, regarding the importance of the Roma culture and interculturality. Regarding the community approach this was implemented by opening a centre for parents and children from 0 to 6 years old. Here have been implemented educational activities for the children, with the purpose of developing their abilities and preparing them for school and kindergarten.

The project had as main target group the preschool and ante-preschool children, with ages from 0 to 6 years. At the same time, during the project there have been organized activities for the parents, with the aim of realizing parental education.

Results

✔ Accompaniment to kindergarten – 17 children transported daily, as an average, to kindergarten and to the center
✔ 164 educational sessions and play activities, implemented during the project with a participation of 10-30 children for session
Therapy sessions for children with psychological counselling and speech therapy: 41 sessions on psychological counselling and 56 speech therapy sessions on an average of 4-5 children/session, 17 children involved in total
62 counselled mothers concerning the importance of early childhood education
Immunization campaign and enrolment to the family doctor
312 households visits to the community
Accompanying the people from the community when accessing health services, social services
Organizing campaigns and supporting the parents for enrolling their children to school and kindergarten - approximately 100 children enrolled to school and kindergarten during the project

<< This project brought us something that we couldn’t do for our children by ourselves, I believe. We couldn’t educate them as this project did. >>
Carmeluta Taniu, mother

<< Due to the fact that the children came to the centre and they saw the type of activities that were made there, the parents realized that education is important and they came to the conclusion it’s ok to let them go to school and to kindergarten. The relation got stronger, we communicate more. The children ask their parents all the time “I want to go to the center, I want to go to kindergarten” especially, to school. >>
Gabriela Cicea, local coordinator

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III. A short description of the national group meetings

As established within the project proposal, the partners of Rom UP! formed national working groups with the aim of debating the successful educational experiences and discuss about the viability of transferring these experiences in each national context. The national working groups were composed of Roma people with no academic studies, respected in their community and active in the process of promoting the Roma values and Roma culture; teachers working in schools with high percentage of Roma students, community mediators, and representatives of the authorities.

In each country two meetings of the working groups have been organized, as follows: Spain, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Ireland. The first meeting had as main purpose to introduce the project, to do its presentation, its aims, activities and expected results. Also, during the meeting the working document of the meeting was introduced, the European Report presenting the Successful Educational Experiences.

At the second meeting the members of the groups discussed about the viability of the actions to be implemented at the national level and proposals were made for drafting the national viability strategy, taking into account the national context. The discussions were also a good occasion for the national partners to raise awareness of the national and local actors in the field of education regarding the existence of the successful experiences and the possibility of transferring these experiences, available now for everyone involved in the field, to transfer them at national level.

The information collected from the national working groups was used to draft the national viability strategies, which will be explained in the following pages. However, the most common suggestions and commentaries from the national working groups can be summed up in the following lines:

- Parents to be more active in their children’s education and school life
- Children to have a livelier learning by incorporating interactive learning games and methods
• Teachers to receive training on how to work with children from minority groups, to be acquainted to the background of the different ethnic groups and the life, culture and customs of the different Roma groups
• To try to change the attitudes of the community towards minority groups
• To promote principle of solidarity and tolerance between students
• To monitor students for dropping out of school or leaving a school and move to another, and leaving the country as well
• The work of field workers should be directed to motivating parents to get enrolled in trainings and taking part in Roma integration activities
• To encourage girls to go to school and complete higher level education
IV. National Viability Strategies

The national strategies were drafted in each country, based on the discussions and recommendations from the working groups and including the necessary stages to transfer and implement the successful educational experiences. In the following we will describe the proposals made by the partners in the viability national strategies, to be able to carry out the implementation of the successful educational experiences for the inclusion of Roma selected in the framework of the European project ROM-UP! *The inclusion of Roma through quality successful educational experiences.*

In the first meeting, the members of the working group analysed the viability of each of the 11 selected successful educational experiences, in order to identify the most viable to be implemented in their own country, that would be further worked on in the second meeting, to develop the necessary steps for their implementation. The following experiences have been selected for transference: Bulgaria - *Decreasing the Dropout Rate of Roma Children from School,* Spain - *Family and Community Education,* Romania - *Heterogeneous Groups: Family and Community Education,* Ireland - *Socio-Medical Centres for Roma.*
The main stages that have been identified in the process of implementation of the experiences were the following:

- Awareness campaign addressed to schools, teaching staff, teachers and educational agents
- Awareness campaign addressed to Roma families, the community, Roma and other social organizations, churches were Roma go to and other referent spaces in the neighbourhood
- Implementation of the selected experience
- Necessary resources for its implementation
- Ensuring the SUSTAINABILITY of the activities
- The need of commitments for the implementation of the experiences

The awareness campaigns will help to reach an agreement with the educational authorities and with the community, so that they will support the project. Once this commitment is achieved, and the information about the successful experience will be presented to all parties, everything is set for the next phase, the implementation. A useful way to organize the implementation is by involving volunteers from the community, academic Roma people, who can share their educational experience and will promote education as something of great importance for the life standard improvement of the community.

Sustainability of the experiences that will be implemented is very important, in order to ensure the continuity of the activities. The proposed viability strategies for the implementation of the successful educational experiences are sustainable in the short and long term, how it’s explained throughout the strategies.

Visit the web-site of the project for more information about the working groups meetings and the national strategies!

http://rom-up.eu
ROM-UP! is financed by the European Commission over a period of one year, from April 2012 until March 2013. The project includes eight European partners. The main goal of ROM-UP! is to create an International Romani Network to raise awareness of the successful educational experiences that have been scientifically proven to be effective in promoting the social integration of Roma children and all the students in general, in terms of pursuing educational success.

The specific objectives of the project are:
- Disseminate successful educational experiences in promoting Roma education;
- Develop strategies to carry out successful actions in the participating countries;
- Involve Roma in the selection of good educational practices carried out in their communities;
- Establish networks of coordination between the coordinators, Roma communities and education agents in order to overcome Roma educational exclusion.

ROM-UP! will contribute to achieve the main goals of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, offering explicit, detailed and concrete successful educational measures to be transferred and implemented in different European contexts. This will involve a tangible improvement of Roma people’s life conditions, especially, the most vulnerable. ROM-UP! will offer concrete successful measures in order to ensure that all Roma children have access to quality education, ensuring primary school completion, reducing the number of early school leavers and promoting the access to tertiary education.

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