

SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Women's Place in Aliveri
& other successful
educational experiences
Volos - Greece**

VIABILITY STRATEGY
FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION
IN GREECE



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SUMMARY

Our plan (P3) for the organization of National Working Groups (NWG) and a National Seminar (NS) was initially the organization of 2 -3 NWG at national level, which would result in December 2012 to a call for more educational bodies to draft and adopt at least one successful educational experience.

Our original plan needed to be significantly altered and to add additional meetings and sessions "listening to" the data transported to us by the participants in the NWGs. In briefly we note the following

Due to the severe economic crisis and the difficulties of the state mechanism in Greece, the transportation of employees or other stakeholders in order to participate in the NWG does not seem to be feasible

We decided for this reason that the NWG should be established by local representatives and as so the barrier of lack of resources does not exist

In order to ensure the dissemination of results at national level, we thought to send the results and the minutes of the meetings to the "National Contact Point for Roma" in the Ministry of Labour in Athens, which in turn forwards them to other ministries (e.g . the Ministry of Education)

Due to the economic crisis, two variables showed up that hinder any 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 Romas, the reinforcement of stereotypes and racism and the increased competition for the share of the available scarce resources

Additionally, firings and ongoing 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.

In response to this situation, we have launched a broad consultation plan (Public, local-authority's bodies, Romas associations, parents associations), with the ultimate aim of establishing a local plan for the promotion of Romas education that: will raise the obstacles for the implementation of new proposals, will broaden the number of schools with Roma children, will measure the available resources and the resources to be sought for its implementation and will forward a political declaration of the intention of the local community to promote the inclusion of Roma by any means.

Finally, we should note that this whole process does not seem to be implemented anywhere else in Greece, which as a country resembles as a "frozen" landscape in terms of mobility, and it has been already agreed the direct distribution of own funds by the participants of the NWG for their implementation, and it seems to exist a forecast for additional funding for their implementation on condition that a comprehensive plan will be elaborated which apart from the successful experiences will take care to remove those obstacles that hinder their immediate implementation

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INTRODUCTION

Successful educational experiences that have been presented during the working group discussions appear to have application's potential in the schools of our region and further more in the schools of the country.

The participants in the processing of the successful experiences have raised the issue of their applicability and of the strategy that should be followed to overcome difficulties arising from stereotypes and prejudices, from inflexibility of the educational system and from the effects of the economic crisis in public education and government.

As part of a sustainable strategy in a crisis situation, such as the one experienced in Greece from 2009, it could only initially be taken into account the possibility of using the available, but minimal today, resources of the local government, the university and the school units that are interested in implementing new methods, and also the possibility of voluntary action.

The common difficulties that have been identified did not appear in whether school directors are willing to adopt and implement new educational tools to support the education of Roma, but more in whether this is feasible, mainly on practical issues, such as the financing of materials, the potential transfer of students and the adequacy of schools to implement them.

A common finding has been that the lack of operational resources and the merger of schools due to the economic crisis has led to re-feeding stereotypes and prejudices and has formed a competitive environment with a negative meaning for claiming additional resources.

In contrast, the positive trend of promoting Roma education programmes through the 3rd and 4th European Supporting Framework for Greece has formed a sharp and abrupt demand by Roma families for enrolments in kindergartens and primary schools of the country, making public education's infrastructures insufficient even to accept students in schools of the country, while, at best, great in number classes are being established (of 35 or 40 children) concerning the sensitive first grades of the compulsory education. In several cases it has been observed that there are no

places in the kindergartens for young Roma children or that the provided places are very far away from the place of residence of the family and as a result they do not have the potential to support the schooling of their children and the same families fall off from the school. In some cases where Roma students are being accepted, this leads to very large classes since additional resources and teachers do not accompany the enrolment of most of the children.

Under these conditions, there is a fall in the level of the provided education, with increased trends to school-transfers of non-Roma students to schools without Roma, and in some cases, such as in a neighbouring town close to Volos city in Thessaly region, non-Roma parents and local politicians promote solutions that are characterized by the separation of students by promoting pure Roma schools.

This latter is the most dangerous side of social inclusion since under the Greek legislation Romas are not considered as a minority in order for minority schools to be permitted, while circulars of the Greek Ministry of Education recommend the dispersion of students if in a school there is an increase of the Roma students above 50% of the total number of students of a school. Also the constitutional principles of compulsory and free-of-charge education for all citizens are being infringed and the actions of the past decade that really improved the relationship of Romas with the public education are being cancelled in practice

The National Working Group has concluded that any implementation of new educational tools for the Romas, such as for example the successful educational experiences of ROM-UP! guide, should have an integrated character, should incorporate parallel and supportive actions in a single plan that will seek for official support, for commitment of resources and for its funding.

The individual actions that should be included in such a plan aim at the following:

- the expansion of the local schools that offer public education positions to Romas

- the development of mechanisms to prevent the creation of segregated schools and of schools without resources only for the Romas
- the awareness of teachers and non-Roma parents on Roma social inclusion issues
- the awareness of Romas for the education
- the synergy between educational players at local level (Municipality, University, Administration of Primary Education, directors of school units and teachers' associations, associations of parents and carers, and the local society)

The first actions that have been co-decided by the participants in consultation's workshops within ROM-UP! framework concern the following:

Mapping of resources, risks and opportunities in a process of promoting the education of Roma

Policy statement by the municipality for its willingness to support measures to improve the accessibility of Roma students to school. The statement is also countersigned by all stakeholders in compulsory education, players who participated in ROM-UP! consultation

Broad consultation with stakeholders or with whichever citizens' category can support or hinder such an effort

Development of a **Local Action Plan** as a road map for actions that are directly accessible to all and within which the resources that may be available will be also described (from the available recourses of all players) or even sought

ESSENTIAL STEPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN GREECE:

1. Locate those schools of an area that incorporate a small or a large number of Roma children
2. Call for a meeting in order to present the tools and to encourage their use or dissemination
3. Consultation meeting and approval of implementation by the decision-makers
4. Presentation of the Plan to associations of teachers and parents and carers in order for them to suggest subsidiary changes
5. Integration of the Final Plan in the general Local Operational Plans, where applicable (for example, those of the municipalities). Elaboration of a list with the available own resources and also of a list with the resources that can be sought as additional ones, provided that this is essential by the extend and the specific requirements of the implementation
6. Development of a monitoring group for the implementation and evaluation of the results

STEP 1: Locate those schools of an area that incorporate a small or a large number of Roma children

In an initial mapping of the available material and human resources to implement the proposed successful educational experiences, it is important to locate the schools in which Roma students are today enrolled, and also their neighbouring ones, as it has also emerged from the consultation with educational players and with the Roma community, during our pilot implementation in the city of Volos.

The widespread publicity or the awareness campaigns that have been initiated by other partners of the ROM-UP! programme do not seem appropriate in our case, since, during this period of economic crisis in Greece, it seems that a breakout of negative stereotypes event would be initiated for the group.

On the contrary, we suggest to pre-exist a bilateral communication with each one of the stakeholders in

the Romas education issue and with each school, and afterwards to organise an open meeting, with as possible homogeneous groups, with the aim to prepare them and to acquire their commitment step-by-step

In our consultation, the forecast of any of our plan for a Roma students' dispersion from schools with an overconcentration towards neighbouring schools with little or no Roma children has also been emerged. This seems to constitute by itself a proposed educational experience since we have the possibility of removing stereotypes and prejudices from the contact of other students with Roma students who have been selected on the basis of their existing preparation for inclusion from the kindergarten and other preschool educational structures.

STEP 2: Call for a meeting in order to present the tools and to encourage their use or dissemination

From the moment that the preparation of the first stage has been finalised, the representatives of schools / organisations that we have seen and discussed bilaterally are being invited, in order for an action plan to be drawn up to implement all or some of the proposed practices. It is better all relevant material to be distributed also to those who have not decided to implement one of our practices, since they can be prepared for a future application, to become a reason of a fruitful search of similar practices or simply to spread our effort among teachers and parents.

It is important to emphasise that the people involved and influence the decision on the application, even within a school unit, are many, with different political and ideological backgrounds and they possess different attitudes and sensitivities concerning the issue of social inclusion of vulnerable social groups. In this light, it is important that the participants should be convinced on

the value of this effort and not to be pressed to submit their consent by simply relying on the concept of human rights.

It is also important that the debate should not begin by making promises with increased expectations for additional resources, but to be rotated around the best usage of existing resources and available tools. The additional resources, if needed and it is realistic to find them, will have a positive effect later.

In our case, several resources and tools have been sought and found within the existing potential of most of the players (for example, the University of Thessaly is going to contribute with students and supervisors to strengthen schools that want to implement some of the successful educational experiences).

STEP 3: Consultation meeting and approval of implementation by the decision-makers

The conclusions, the applications and the means of implementation that have been designed so far are

necessary to be validated by the representatives of the participating players that take institutional decisions. In

our example, a common view of all the participants has been that the Plan should be approved by the City Council as a proposal by the cooperating parties, and this approval to have a political character as a sample of the city and its stakeholders intention to seriously engage in the issue of social integration of Roma children in the school system as an operational goal of the city.

The view of the participants has been that such a text would "free the hands" of the rest players in order to be engaged in a widespread implementation of the discussed proposals and actions in favour of the Roma students.

It has been also considered as useful by the project group of ROM-UP! that there should not be a reference in the text of the Declaration in favour of the Roma

students of the ROM-UP! programme, from which the whole process has been initiated, since for many participants this fact would mean that the whole framework deals just with a European programme and that is not an endogenous process of all involved parties.

The contribution of the University was also important concerning the validity of the data that described the situation, but also as a pole to raise funds on a voluntary basis (for example, by enhancing the implementation with students or educational material and by supervising from the university of the implementations for diversity and for the particular needs of social groups with linguistic-cultural particularities)

STEP 4: Presentation of the Plan to associations of teachers and parents and carers in order for them to suggest subsidiary changes

We have found that important poles for progress or cancellation of the project are the teachers' associations (or the teachers' group of each school) and the parents and carers association of the relevant schools). The lobbying of these groups seems that it may cancel or actually promote any operational activities, but also to "give birth" to modifications and extensions to the actions that we want to undertake in the field. An important fact was found also to be the awareness of the need for training on diversity issues of the teachers in the schools which Roma student attend, and also even the small participation of Roma parents in the parents and carers associations of the schools (which is now practically inexistent).

The local project group (in our case the group of ROM-UP! programme) that supports the entire process operates as follows:

- invitation to all teachers' associations of the schools
- invitation to the representatives and the members of the parents and carers association
- presentation of the action plan (by the University) and of the implementation method (by the Local Action Group)
- the participants watch, with the help of a projector, the proposals and have the opportunity to propose minor modifications or additions
- the meeting ends with as many signatures as possible in the final text, in which it can be seen that they all agree
- the Project Group arrange to send the final material to all participants by email. To those who do not possess an email address, a copy can be send
- the action plan has been released for publicity in order for the signatories to be committed and to acquire the ownership of the positive changes that we envisage through our actions in favour of Roma students
- the final message is: "Together we can – Diversity strengthens democracy"

STEP 5: Integration of the Final Plan in the general Local Operational Plans, where applicable (for example, those of the municipalities). Elaboration of a list with the

available own resources and also of a list with the resources that can be sought as additional ones, provided that this is essential by the extend and the specific requirements of the implementation

The next step concerns the implementation and operation. Each institutional participant should incorporate these principles in favour of the integration of Roma students in education and the proposed actions in its own operational planning

It can be much better, not only if these actions are going to be incorporated, but also be accompanied with a description of the available funds, even if these funds

are minor ones.

It is also important to identify the practical needs to be resolved (for example, students transfer, support with volunteers / students during events and meetings provided, etc). For whatever is not going to be covered by existing resources, it can be sought among sponsorships, grants or other contributions that are realistic and available.

STEP 6: Development of a monitoring group for the implementation and evaluation of the results

The monitoring group for the implementation should involve all stakeholders in the planning and implementation.

The group should include both Roma and non-Roma parents.

The same group will finally evaluate the results and will

provide data, as a feedback to the public dialogue, that confirm the progress of the implementation of the actions for the Romas students' attendance, but also for the improvement of the school level in general (since the latter would help to extend the implementation of the successful educational experiences and their acceptance by all society).

National Working Group of ROM-UP! programme

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