

## **Reflections on Teacher Training for Equity and Social Justice: the INSETRom Cypriot Experience**

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# Reflections on Teacher Training for Equity and Social Justice: the INSETRom Cypriot Experience

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## **Abstract (English)**

This study reports on the evaluation of an in-service teacher training on Roma education and inclusion undertaken in the framework of the European Commission funded INSETRom project. The data presented was collected through pre and post training questionnaires and reflective interviews of the Greek-Cypriot teachers who participated in the training. Data point to the importance of teacher training linked to needs-based interventions at the school level that can enhance teachers' understanding of Roma inclusion. Such training may enable teachers to respond to the challenge of teaching in multicultural classrooms when aiming at educational equity and social justice. The study, which holds implications for the design of training for Roma inclusion in particular and intercultural education in more general, reflects on issues of sustainability of teacher training as well as the transferability of successful outcomes in different educational and school contexts.

Keywords: Roma education; teacher in-service training; INSETRom project; Cyprus

## **Abstract (Greek)**

Η μελέτη αυτή αναφέρεται στην αξιολόγηση της ενδοϋπηρεσιακής επιμόρφωσης εκπαιδευτικών για την εκπαίδευση και ένταξη των τσιγγάνων, η οποία διεξήχθη στα πλαίσια του επιχορηγημένου από την Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή προγράμματος INSETRom. Τα δεδομένα που παρουσιάζονται συλλέγηκαν μέσα από ερωτηματολόγια πριν και μετά την επιμόρφωση καθώς και μέσα από αναστοχαστικές συνεντεύξεις των Ελληνοκυπρίων εκπαιδευτικών που συμμετείχαν στην επιμόρφωση. Τα δεδομένα καταδεικνύουν τη σημαντικότητα της επιμόρφωσης εκπαιδευτικών όταν αυτή συνδέεται με παρεμβάσεις στο σχολικό επίπεδο που βασίζονται σε ανάγκες που προάγουν την κατανόηση των εκπαιδευτικών σε σχέση με την ένταξη των τσιγγάνων. Η επιμόρφωση αυτή βοηθά τους εκπαιδευτικούς να ανταποκριθούν στην πρόκληση της διδασκαλίας σε πολυπολιτισμικές τάξεις με στόχο την εκπαιδευτική ισότητα και την κοινωνική δικαιοσύνη. Η έρευνα, η οποία έχει συνεπαγωγές για το σχεδιασμό επιμόρφωσης για την ένταξη των τσιγγάνων ειδικότερα και για τη διαπολιτισμική εκπαίδευση γενικότερα, αναφέρεται σε θέματα διατήρησης της επιμόρφωσης εκπαιδευτικών και μεταφοράς των επιτυχημένων αποτελεσμάτων σε διαφορετικά εκπαιδευτικά και σχολικά περιβάλλοντα.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: εκπαίδευση τσιγγάνων· ενδοϋπηρεσιακή επιμόρφωση εκπαιδευτικών· πρόγραμμα INSETRom· Κύπρος

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## **Introduction**

The different Roma groups account for about 10-12 million people, scattered in most countries of the world. Both international and European bodies recommend the surge for improving the socio-economic status and social inclusion of Roma through actions such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination published in February 2009 (CERD; <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/>), the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 initiative of twelve European governments (<http://www.romadecade.org/>), and the establishment of the European Roma Rights Centre (<http://www.errc.org/>). Hence, the renewed attention on Roma issues in academic circles and policy-makers over the past years and the enhanced interest on the inclusion of Roma in the educational processes in the member states of the European Union.

However, despite increased efforts for the elimination of discrimination against Roma, policy action and reforms do not seem to have prompted significant improvements in raising barriers to equal access to employment, health care, education and housing faced by Roma. In Europe, specifically, Roma are described as the most disadvantaged ethnic group across the continent; latest brutalities (e.g. the humiliation of six Roma detainees by policemen in Kosice, Slovakia in April 2009) and racist outbursts (e.g. the television advertisement of the right wing party NS in the Czech Republic referring to the 'final solution for the gypsy issue' in May 2009) outline the social isolation of Roma. Similarly, incidents like the one that made the round of the world with the Italian sunbathers ignoring with indifference two drowned Roma girls in July 2008, rocked Europe for the possibility of European societies being gripped by anti-Roma feelings.

This isolation is accompanied with educational exclusion. The reproduction of disadvantaged living circumstances in the Roma community is often attributed to the lack of educational attainment for Roma, as only one percent of Roma are college educated and Roma parents remain illiterate (Abend, 2006). Several studies express concerns over Roma/Traveller children's educational exclusion and underachievement (e.g. in the United Kingdom, Cudworth, 2008; in Spain, Mariano, 2004; in Cyprus, Demetriou & Trimikliniotis, 2007). Derrington (2007) identifies several 'pull and push' factors that impact on Gypsy/Traveller children's school engagement and retention, the strongest being cultural dissonance -a result of conflicting expectations between home and school- and social exclusion. Students who rely on maladaptive coping strategies, such as fight (physical and verbal retaliation and non-compliance), flight (self-imposed exclusion) and playing white (passing identity by concealing or denying one's heritage), to deal with psychosocial stress tend to drop out of school early, while those who display more adaptive strategies such as cognitive re-framing, developing social support networks and

adopting a bicultural identity tend to stay in school up to the age of 16. Lloyd and Stead (2001) point that Roma/Traveller children experience frequent racist bullying and name calling, which are often not acknowledged by the school. In enhancing the educational inclusion of Roma, Kyuchukov (2000) proposes three areas of needs: adaptation and integration of Roma children into mainstream schools and community involvement in the educational process; interactive methods in language acquisition - introducing Romani as a mother tongue and the official language as a second language to Roma- and anti-bias education provided for non-Roma teachers working with Roma children to help them overcome their existing prejudices and racism; new approaches, more community oriented and closer to the cultural values of Roma, for the education of dropouts. The recommendations underline the importance of focusing on both parents as well as teachers.

The study reported in this paper focuses on the evaluation of an in-service teacher training on Roma education and inclusion undertaken within the framework of a European Union funded project entitled INSETRom (IN-Service Training for Roma Inclusion, 134018-LLP-1-2007-1-CY-COMENIUS-CMP), involving educational institutions in eight European countries. INSETRom is founded on the thesis that the development of adequate teacher in-service training along with the improvement of classroom practice and family-school-community relationships fosters inclusion and equity. Curriculum development, teacher training, and intervention strategies, all part of the INSETRom project, are based on research on teachers' views and practices with respect to educating Roma students as well as on Roma community members' perspectives on schooling. The current paper discusses data obtained through instruments distributed to teachers prior to and upon the completion of the training, as well as reflection interviews with teachers during the training.

### **Roma and their Education in Cyprus**

Roma in Cyprus, better known among Greek-Cypriots as *Cigani* or *Tsiggani*, are one of the smallest minorities living on the island. Despite testimonies of Roma presence in Cyprus since 500 AD, it is more possible that Roma arrived in the island between 1322 and 1400 as a result of Indian migration (Marsh & Strand, 2003). The first written record about Roma in Cyprus appears in the Chronicle of Cyprus in 1468 AD, where the 'Cigani' are said to have paid tax to the Royal treasury at the time of the Lusignan King James (Kenrick & Taylor, 1986), whereas in 1486 there is reference to 'Cigani' in taxation records (Hatay, 2003). Marsh and Strand (2003) indicate these as some of the earliest references to Dom Gypsies in European history, suggesting that Cyprus was the point of contact for the Rom and Dom populations. Kyrris (1969) contends that during the Venetian possession of the island, Roma came as soldiers for military purposes from Corfu and during the Ottoman rule that followed in 1571 AD became Muslim after their military role deteriorated. A second wave of Roma arrived to the island with the Ottoman conquest of the island. During the eighteenth century most Roma of Cyprus were reported as Muslim Roma called *Ghurbeti*, whereas fewer, reported as living amongst them, were Greek Orthodox Christian Roma, better known as *Mandi*. In a 2004 UNOPS report, however, it is suggested that the Roma of Cyprus have always been Muslims. In 1911, during the British Colonial Rule in Cyprus (1878-1959), records refer to only 152 Roma.

In 1960 with the independence of the Republic of Cyprus, when the Roma population of Cyprus, according to the Constitution, became officially part of the Turkish-Cypriot community (Administrative Commissioner, 2003), 520 Roma were reported as belonging to the Turkish-Cypriot community. Williams (2000) suggests several reasons behind this decision, favouring linguistic, rather than the religious reasons. In fact, the Roma were not granted a 'religious group' status during the negotiations for the establishment of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus like other religious groups, namely Maronites, Armenians and Latins. Consequently, Roma of Cyprus were never recognized as a national minority, religious group or any group with a certain identity and culture (Demetriou & Trimikliniotis, 2007; Trimikliniotis, 2007). Although the language of Roma in Cyprus is closely related to the Roma of Europe and both Mandi and Ghurbeti speak a kind of Romany-similar to English Romani (Marsh & Strand, 2003)- the language of the younger generation of the former is Greek and the latter is Turkish.

Following the 1974 Turkish invasion in Cyprus and the forced transfer of Greek-Cypriots living in the north of the island to the south and the Turkish-Cypriots living in the south to the north, Mandi living in the north were forcibly moved to the south and Ghurbeti to the north (Marsh & Strand, 2003). In another account, Iacovidou (2009) suggests that Roma chose to live with the Turkish-Cypriots, since they considered them as old allies against the Greek-Cypriots who became hostile towards Roma due to the reinvigoration of their old suspicion that Roma were spies for the Turks. After being moved, Roma settled in houses abandoned by their original owners (Greek- or Turkish-Cypriots) creating new communal groupings on both sides of the demarcation line.

Starting from October 1999, but especially during 2001, several Roma groups from the north moved to the south -mainly Limassol and Paphos- and settled in socio-economically deprived areas of the two towns. Since April 2003, when travel restrictions across the demarcation line were eased, the influx of Roma to the south increased. Compared to the previous years, larger numbers of Roma resided in the Republic of Cyprus-controlled south while migration between the two sectors became more regular.

Except from the Ghurbeti and the very few Mandi, the Romanlar - namely the Turkish Roma from Anatolia coming through waves of illegal settlement since the late '70s - are also reported to live today in Cyprus (Marsh & Strand, 2003). Altogether, Roma in Cyprus reach approximately 1500, of whom 570 live in the south (UNOPS, 2004). Marsh and Strand (2003) argue that the real number of Roma in Cyprus reaches 2000-3000 people, resulting from the annual influx of illegal Anatolian Romanlar. This information cannot be confirmed, as the Republic of Cyprus does not hold official records on the Roma (Agathokleous, 2005).

Roma in Cyprus have to a large extent been ignored, avoided and kept on the margins of the local society (Demetriou & Trimikliniotis, 2007; Trimikliniotis, 2007), a fact mainly attributed to the dominant perceptions and knowledge about them (Iacovidou, 2009). During the first half of the current decade when the influx of Roma from the north to the south increased, Roma had no allowances for medical treatment, education or work (Iacovidou, 2009). According to recent European Commission reports on social exclusion in Cyprus, Roma are one of the local social

groups -alongside with elderly persons living alone, single parents, drug users, as well as immigrants and the disabled- which fall outside the social networks (European Commission, 2005; Council of the European Union, 2006).

According to the constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, Roma pupils living at the south part of the country enrol in Greek-Cypriot schools, like any other child at school age. However, despite a ten year compulsory education in Cyprus, Roma who fail to send their children to school are not considered to violate the law. Social services, however, try to convince Roma families to urge their children to attend and stay in school, while parents are presented with various incentives, such as uniforms, shoes, school equipment, in order to keep their children in schools (Agathokleous, 2005). As a result, according to official information, the numbers of Turkish and Roma pupils in Greek-Cypriot primary schools have increased from 30 during 2000-2001 to 90 during 2003-04. Of the 91 students enrolled during 2004-05, 29 were in Paphos and 62 in Limassol. This number has exceeded 100 Roma pupils the current school-year 2008-2009.

Roma children's attendance of Greek-Cypriot schools is not reported as unproblematic. Data on Roma students' enrolment, attainment and dropout rates is indicative of the seriousness of the situation, as a result of which most Roma children end up almost illiterate (Demetriou & Trimikliniotis, 2007). Two 2003 studies showed that Roma parents in Limassol saw no reason to send their children to school, as they understood nothing; they got into fights and felt excluded (Hatzitheodoulou-Loizidou & Symeou, 2003; Trimikliniotis, 2007). Despite improvement in the attendance of primary school during 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, there were serious problems with high levels of drop-outs and the transition between primary and secondary school. A study by Demetriou and Trimikliniotis (2007) reported a trend towards Roma segregation in schools with high concentration of migrants, minorities and Greek-Cypriots from poorer backgrounds, despite an official policy of non-segregation. As the same researchers pointed, seemingly positive local measures intended to desegregate Roma by dividing classes with a lot of Roma, coupled with provision of additional language classes resulted in further marginalization of Roma students. The study indicated racial prejudice towards the Roma, as well as negative attitudes of the Roma towards education, seen as an unnecessary burden. At the same time, measures adopted to provide education for Roma were not evaluated. The researchers pointed to the inadequacy of the school curricula, the absence of relevant teacher training, the language barriers and the overall failure of the system to recognise Roma culture and contribution to society as the factors predetermining the poor performance of Roma students. Moreover, Trimikliniotis (2007) suggested that Roma children in Greek-Cypriot schools were treated as 'Turkish speaking' and their mother tongue was assumed to be Turkish, despite the fact that they mostly spoke Kurbetcha, a Romany dialect.

In light of the research above, the inclusion strategy in the Greek-Cypriot educational system needs to become more comprehensive, so as to cope with varying sources of social exclusion, faced by vulnerable groups of a different cultural background, like Roma. It also needs to be more flexible and forward-looking, so as to keep pace with the rapidly changing character of the Cypriot society. In doing so, a more critically orientated humanistic education based on tolerance and understanding appears more appropriate. This becomes particularly evident by studies indicating

that the increasingly multicultural character of the Cypriot society is not welcomed by youth and children and that Greek-Cypriot children adopt primarily negative understandings and views about several national groups, including Roma (Hatzitheodoulou-Loizidou & Symeou, 2003; 2007; Philippou 2004).

## **Methodology**

As already pointed, this study reports on the evaluation of an in-service teacher training on Roma education and inclusion in Cyprus undertaken within the framework of the INSETRom project. The methodology adopted in this project takes as granted that Roma marginalisation is related to Roma people's lack of participation in the school system, oftentimes caused by teachers' misconceptions about the Roma culture. Moreover, the methodology acknowledges the widely different ways in which Roma relate to schooling, which are often disregarded when educators shape the educational goals of the subjects' point of view (the Roma, in this case). Thus, the research methodology focuses on the way participant schools, in particular, and the educational system, in general, are organised and the cultural rules around Roma pupils' schooling problem. Moreover, an effort is made towards investigating how the concepts of integration and inclusion through schooling maintain or solve Roma pupils' limited inclusion. The questions posed relate to whether and how the educational system and the schools set an educational opportunity for Roma children, constructing a comprehensible picture about the ways in which education is perceived by schools and Roma families.

### ***The sample***

Initial data was collected from the three schools attended by the largest numbers of Roma children in the Greek-Cypriot educational system. Two of the schools are situated in the urban area of a city centre; the first is a primary school and the second is a lower secondary school in the same catchment area. The third school is in a rural area of a different district. The urban primary school is situated in the west side of the city nearby the so-called Turkish-Cypriot neighbourhood. 116 pupils are enrolled in the school all together, of which 44 of them are Turkish-Cypriots or Roma, 9 are Turkish speaking, 57 are Greek Cypriots and the rest are of other ethnic origin. The lower secondary school is situated in a close distance to the previous school and it used to operate in the same building with the local upper secondary school until 1993. The school has around 230 students all together of which 10 to 12 are Turkish-Cypriots or Roma. The Turkish-Cypriots and Roma attendance is poor and usually is interrupted during the first grade (at the age of 12-13). The rural primary school is operating with 336 pupils all together, out of which 69 are non-Greek-Cypriots and 6 are Roma. The school reports that the attendance of the Roma pupils is irregular and that the language of communication is only Turkish.

All three schools share similar characteristics: presence of Roma, Turkish-Cypriot and non-Greek speaking students, low socio economic composition of the region, large numbers of children facing educational difficulties. All three belong to the Zones of Educational Priority, an institution introduced to the Cyprus educational system during the last five years. Although the initial aim of these Zones was to upgrade cooperation with the local community, the objectives have been extended to include, among others, improving communication and cooperation between the

schools belonging to the Zone thus aiming at the effective resolution of mutual problems; between the schools, pupils' parents and the local community; and between schools and the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute as well as the Service of Educational Psychologists for the organisation of in-service teacher training seminars. In addition, the Zones aim to provide classes during the afternoons and summer vacation to foreign students and to children with educational difficulties, to organise cultural and athletic events in the afternoon hours and weekends, and to apply new technologies to improve teaching and school attractiveness to the students.

### ***The preliminary needs assessment***

Following the selection of the participant schools, the research team proceeded with fieldwork in the schools. The main aim of this initial phase of the project was to undertake a needs assessment of teachers, Roma parent and their children in the specific three schools with regards to Roma schooling, thus providing the basis for curriculum development for teacher in-service training on Roma educational inclusion. More specifically, to identify teacher training needs in the three participant schools, the study explored through semi-structured interviews of a sample of teachers', parents' and children's articulation of "problems" with regards to Roma education. Before collecting the data, rapport with the teaching staff and Roma families in the schools was established.

Interviews were transcribed while interview questions comprised the framework for the qualitative analysis. Emerging themes took into account the context, the nature of the respondents and methodological considerations. The findings deriving by means of content analysis formed the basis for particular variables (e.g. parent-teacher relations, needs, prejudices etc.). A comparison between the outcomes of the interviews of the three groups underlined similarities as well as differences in perceptions on the emerging themes.

### ***The curriculum***

Based on the findings of this initial needs assessment, a common analytic curriculum for teacher training was designed from all partners participating in the project. The training aimed at enhancing teachers' awareness of the Roma culture and developing skills and strategies to engage Roma parents in order to become active agents in their children's education. The training curriculum included goals, modules and methodology and targeted curricular sections responding to each country's specific educational needs as these evolved through the preceding needs assessment study. Thus the curriculum had a considerable core common to all countries, but responded to specific local needs and the existing differences within different countries and Roma populations. The training modules ([http://www.iaie.org/insetrom/1\\_materials\\_curriculum.html](http://www.iaie.org/insetrom/1_materials_curriculum.html)) were as follows (more information on goals is provided in Appendix 1): Culture and enculturation, Stereotypes and prejudices, Roma history, Roma culture, Cultures of the schools-The arts and cultural diversity, Intercultural education, Classroom management and methodology, Curriculum development, Teacher-parent communication.

### *The training*

The teacher in-service training seminars were organised and provided for primary and secondary school teachers (as well as school psychologists and other teaching personnel, like teacher assistants, socio-medical assistants, missionary assistants) of target schools in all the partner countries between November 2008 and April 2009. The training aimed at supporting teacher participants to apply intervention strategies and social-psychological strategies to involve Roma parents in their children's education by effectively communicating with Roma parents and developing an action plan at class and/or school level. Each partner aimed at training a minimum of 10 teachers and a maximum of 20 teachers in the teachers' language. The training was provided by a small team of trainers from each partner; two to three national experts complemented this team and provided the necessary national context and input. The choice of teams of trainers accentuated the cross-curricular character of the topic (e.g. history, citizenship, literature and school psychological issues) and created an active support network in each school. According to curriculum load and the working culture in each institution, the duration of the training ranged from four to five meetings of three to five hours each adjusted accordingly.

In Cyprus, the teacher training curriculum was adjusted to the topics that appeared of most interest to teachers: Culture and enculturation, Roma history, Roma culture, Intercultural education, Classroom management and methodology, and Curriculum development. Five meetings took place at one of the schools during February-April 2009. Each afternoon meeting lasted around three hours each. Out of the 17 participants, 14 were teachers and three were local social agents; all teacher trainees had Roma children in the class, ranging from 15% to 75%.

### *The instruments*

The data presented in this paper was collected through pre and post training questionnaires and reflective interviews of the Greek-Cypriot teachers who participated in the training. In particular, the pre-training questionnaires included questions on the general teaching background of these teachers (age of students, subjects, teaching of Roma), as well as their experience teaching Roma, e.g. levels of training to teach Roma children or Roma issues (culture and history); levels of confidence to teach Roma children and Roma issues and to address stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma in the classroom; relations between Roma and other children; relations of teachers with Roma parents; teachers' challenges when teaching Roma children and Roma issues in the classroom; kind of training necessary to help with Roma students or Roma issues; adequacy of present teaching materials regarding Roma history; suggestions and comments.

The post-training questionnaire aimed to capture participants' views on training aspects, such as the content, the clarity of presentation, the training methodology, the duration and the trainers. This questionnaire asked also teachers to indicate the training modules that they considered most and least valuable and the modules that they considered most and least useful for their teaching practice. Furthermore, teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which training met their expectations, as well as their levels of confidence teaching Roma students, teaching Roma issues and addressing stereotypes. Finally, teachers were asked to indicate the

strategies that they intended to use to implement new insights and materials after the training, along with possible barriers in implementing ideas and strategies, resulting from the training programme.

The reflective interviews collected teacher insights on issues such as strengths, weaknesses and barriers of the offered training along with sustainability and impact of the training on everyday school practice.

The following section of the paper presents the findings of the analysis of the data collected through the pre and post training questionnaires and the reflective interviews of the participant teachers. The analysis uses this data to draw out and discuss themes and patterns which may offer insights of theoretical concerns with regard to the design of training for Roma inclusion in particular and intercultural education in more general.

## **Findings of the study**

### ***Expectations of the training***

The analysis of the collected data showed that participant teachers described themselves as not well trained for teaching in classes with Roma children. Among the fourteen teachers who participated in the study only two claimed being somewhat well trained. As one of these two teachers explained on the pre-training questionnaire, after his appointment at the specific school and feeling unprepared to teach in a class with a culturally diverse population, he/she took initiatives for his/her own professional development which would enhance his/her relevant knowledge and skills. “After 5 years of dealing with them, I now feel confident that I can make it”, he/she reports (teacher 4). Two teachers stated feeling not being trained at all, whereas the rest eight teachers stated being not well trained and indicated that their “teaching is based purely on personal knowledge and interest” (teacher 1) or that they “have attended only a few short relevant training sessions” (teacher 2).

Similar was their description regarding the evaluation of their ability to teach about Roma issues (relating for instance to culture and history). Two teachers stated being somewhat well trained, one not well trained and all the rest not at all trained. Not surprisingly, the teachers who stated being somewhat trained related their evaluation to their personal effort and initiative to become more knowledgeable about Roma and their education and linked their ability to teach about Roma issues to their acquired empirical and day-to-day experience with Roma children throughout the years they were appointed to the specific school.

Hence, no trained teachers expressed confidence in teaching Roma children. More specifically, six participant teachers stated feeling somewhat confident in teaching Roma children, another six not very confident and two teachers not confident at all (Table 1). Once again, all teachers who expressed some confidence in teaching Roma children linked their confidence to their gained experience with Roma rather than to relevant training: “through the lessons I teach” (teacher 2), “I do what I think is better” (teacher 14), “I am never sure with Roma children” (teacher 4), were some of their statements.

Fewer teachers stated feeling confident in teaching about Roma issues with their pupils in general. In more specific no teacher stated feeling absolute sure in doing so, two stated somewhat sure, five not so sure and the rest not at all sure (Table 2). Most teachers responding to the “not sure at all” item reported something similar to what Teacher 8 responded: “I don’t know at all how to deal with such issues in my class”. Teachers’ statements about their feeling of confidence in addressing existing stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma in their class, showed more positive evaluations (Table 3). One teacher stated being very confident, whereas four stated being somewhat confident. Four teachers considered being not very confident in addressing existing stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma in their class and five not confident at all.

Trainees in overall stated that other children maintain positive relations with Roma children in their class. No teachers described these relations as not good at all, and only three that these are not so good. The rest eleven teachers described the relations between Roma children and the other children in their class as good. Some of these teachers pointed out that “Roma children have collaborative relationships with the other children” (teacher 7) and that “They accept friendship and cooperation. They need time though...” (teacher 9). No teacher, however, described the relations between Roma children and the other children in their class as excellent.

As regards teachers’ evaluation of their relations with Roma parents, this was either good or fair (seven teachers in each case). Teachers described Roma as “appreciating teachers-especially male and accepting suggestions even if they don’t implement them” (teacher 7). Some teachers commented though on their evaluation of these relations that it is only some Roma parents that they know and maintain relations with.

On referring to challenges when teaching Roma children, teachers mentioned a few, but most teachers referred to the challenge for Roma children’s consistent school attendance and ability to learn to read and write in Greek as their second language. “Even only to make them to want to stay in the class is a huge challenge!”, states one teacher (teacher 11). In doing so, some explained that they are always challenged to keep them alert, interested and concentrated to the school programme. One teacher stated that this is hard, because they have to challenge “their mentality, their spite for some issues, that, even though are simple, in the process they do them difficult” (teacher 1). Another teacher said:

*The biggest challenge is to find a way or a window to their world, so I become able to provide them with as many as I can, among those that I consider would be useful for them. (teacher 6).*

A few teachers complained that their task is very difficult given the lack of school material for teaching Roma children (teacher 2).

When asked which is teachers’ greatest challenge when teaching about Roma issues in their class, most teachers stated they had never done so, for instance to teach about Roma culture and history. In explaining why, some pointed to the fact that the greatest challenge is first of all for teachers themselves to learn about Roma and their culture and then teach about it, because as one teacher explained “I might-without

purpose- transmit some stereotypes for Roma -wrong ones- to my pupils” (teacher 3). Some others pointed out that many of Roma pupils do not accept and do not identify themselves as Roma, which makes the possibility of teaching about Roma issues even more complicated.

Teachers link these challenges with what training they would consider to especially help them in their daily work with Roma children. They stated that they would like to become more trained on Roma culture (“so that they do not any mistakes in approaching Roma children”; teacher 6), Roma history, Roma interests, as well as teaching methods and school teaching material, curriculum and textbooks that would increase Roma children school interest and commitment in more general, and make them happy in school, as a teacher noted. Some teachers suggested:

*Anything that is relevant to Roma! From how to teach language and mathematics to these children to how to make them want to learn something in the school. (teacher 1)*

*To learn the way how to handle these children. (teacher 7)*

Another teacher suggested their training to include information on other countries’ experience with Roma education, while another teacher suggested the exchange of visits with schools in other European educational systems that have a large population of Roma and a prolonged experience in their education.

As regards the kind of training that would especially support them in teaching about Roma issues to their pupils, such as Roma history and culture, they suggested training focused on teachers’ learning about these issues and on specific teaching material on Roma culture and history.

In evaluating the present teaching material on Roma history and culture (apart from two teachers who stated that this material is somewhat inadequate), all other teachers were absolutely negative noting that such material is totally inadequate. As teachers explained, the material is non-existent and is product of the work the teachers themselves prepare or re-organise from existing material on other cultural groups or cases. One teacher said characteristically “I have never come across such material” (teacher 14) while some teachers indicated needs towards this endeavour:

*It is absolutely necessary to create teaching material for language and mathematics immediately. This material should correspond to the interests and the way Roma children think and act. (teacher 8)*

Most suggestions pointed to the need for specific provisions for Roma children learning the school language, i.e. Greek: “A bilingual programme should be established in our school” (teacher 2).

### ***Evaluation of the training***

Not surprisingly, after the completion of the training they received, teachers expressed their most positive evaluation for the training module on Roma culture and history, which they described as the most valuable and useful because it had direct relation to

Roma as such. As some teachers explained upon completion of the training, the specific training session provided them with what they mostly felt that they had less knowledge and thus they needed more.

Despite their positive evaluation of specific training modules, teachers expressed only slight increase of their confidence to teach Roma children. As the following table shows, only some trained teachers stated higher confidence in teaching Roma children prior to and after the training.

Table 1: Teachers' perceptions about their confidence to teach Roma children students

Statement:	N	Prior to the training	Post the training
How confident do you feel to teach Roma children?			
Very confident	14	0	1
Somewhat confident	14	6	5
Not very confident	14	6	7
Not at all confident	14	2	1

In explaining their evaluation, teachers pointed out that due to their gained teaching experience with Roma, the training itself could not surpass this experience in a practical level: "We did not receive answers for the essential and practical problems we teachers face in dealing with and helping Roma children in specific" (teacher 12). Therefore, teachers rated as more useful those training sessions that managed to provide tangible, practical guide in resolving day-to-day real class situations. Similarly, they rated as less useful those training sessions in which teachers had relevant experiences and had already an established repertoire of pedagogical strategies that helped them deal with the respective issue. For instance, teachers found less useful the practical examples provided during the session on Classroom management methodology, during which as one teacher stated:

*Even though it was very experientially presented, we deal with even more complicated situations in our everyday life. Instead of receiving practical advice, we gave so many things to the discussion. (teacher 6)*

Similarly another teacher characterised as non-useful aspects from the various sessions that aimed to their broader understanding of issues related to the content presented, "for instance the curriculum development session, because knowing about how to develop a curriculum will not help me [them] at my [their] job" (teacher 2).

Hence, when asked which of their expectations were not met during the training, all trained teachers referred to their expectation for receiving more practical suggestions on how to teach Roma children and adopting their teaching to their culture. Moreover, teachers stated that they felt that the material presented and the content of the suggested activities related more to a multicultural school environment rather than to a Roma school population. As another teacher explained: "My expectation was to be presented a special teaching methodology and content for the

needs and the special characteristics of Roma children” (teacher 13). And another teacher clarified:

*Roma are not as the rest children in a multicultural school. Children from different than the majority of the school cultural backgrounds don't [teacher's emphasis] come to school with serious lack of experiences, knowledge and so forth; they just don't speak the language. This is not the case with Roma. Most of these children have also behavioral problems.* (teacher 4)

In a similar vein, they expressed their disappointment that part of their practice during the training did not include the exchange of practical ideas from other educational systems, such as from programmes and material on how Roma children are educated in schools in other European countries.

Therefore, following the completion of the training, teachers did not state feeling more confident than prior to the training in teaching about Roma issues with their pupils. Even though some teachers expressed a higher confidence upon the completion of the training compared to their responses to the pre questionnaire, the training did not appear to have succeeded in raising teachers' confidence in this aspect (Table 2).

Table 2: Teachers' perceptions about their confidence to teach their pupils about Roma issues

Statement:	N	Prior to the training	Post the training
How confident do you feel generally after the training experience to teach your pupils about Roma issues?			
Very confident	14	0	1
Somewhat confident	14	2	2
Not very confident	14	5	7
Not at all confident	14	7	4

This was confirmed also by some of their statements. Some teachers stated “not receiving any tool to use from the training” (e.g. teacher 3) or that they “need more knowledge and guidance” (e.g. teacher 11).

Similarly, teachers' evaluation about their feeling of confidence in addressing existing stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma in their class following the completion of the training, showed no improvement. Surprisingly, in this question, teachers expressed exactly the same degree of confidence as they did prior to the training (Table 3). Once again, most teachers stated that they “did not feel to have changed compared to before the training” (e.g. teacher 3). From those who reported some confidence in addressing such issues in their class, some related their confidence to their overall confidence in dealing with stereotypes and prejudices towards children from different cultural groups in their class in general rather than towards Roma children in more specific (e.g. teacher 10).

Table 3: Teachers' perceptions about their confidence to address existing stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma in their class

Statement:	N	Prior to the training	Post the training
How confident do you feel after the training module experience about addressing any existing stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma in the classroom?			
Very confident	14	1	1
Somewhat confident	14	4	4
Not very confident	14	4	4
Not at all confident	14	5	5

Teachers' suggestions for the improvement of the training they attended concentrated again on the practical and day-to-day aspects of teaching in multicultural classes with Roma children. Teachers unanimously, both on the post questionnaire and during the reflective interviews, stressed their further need for being trained on more practical aspects of the teaching methodology and management when being a teacher of a class with Roma children. For instance, some teachers referred to application strategies for teaching language and mathematics to Roma children ("what I teach? How I teach it to Roma pupils?", teacher 11); more detailed information about Roma everyday life; coping strategies for incidents of violence and racism between Roma children and other children in the school; and knowing more about foreign experience on Roma education and how material is used and has been developed in other educational systems (e.g. the Greek one where school teaching material are in the same language).

Respectively, what teachers appeared to find more useful was practical ideas or strategies that they could use in self-developing to become able to teach in classes with Roma children. For instance, they found very useful the relevant websites suggested by the trainers or specific ideas that linked teaching to Roma life and culture, e.g. with their artistic aptitude. One teacher noted:

*In the arts lesson I will plan a session for Roma children and the rest to work in groups to create a mosaic on a topic of their own interest. Each pupil will express his/her ideas for what he/she would like to create and the artifacts will decorate a wall in the school. (teacher 7)*

One teacher stated that he/she will try to use strategies to involve more Roma families in their children's school life. He/she said:

*I would like to pursue the idea of home visits of my Roma pupils, so that their parents are convinced to come to school. I will thus be also able to establish positive relations with the Roma families. (teacher 14)*

The more compelling gain for teachers appeared to be the endorsement of the idea that teachers personally need to know more about Roma in order to be able to teach them. For instance, some teachers stated:

*Thus I will become more able to handle my own prejudices first and then teach Roma pupils and other pupils to face their prejudices against Roma. (teacher 4).*

*I plan to work more on accepting Roma uniqueness. Then, I will utilise in my teaching elements on their own culture, so that they accept me and realise that since I can get from them they can get from me. (teacher 7).*

Finally, teachers predicted that they will continue to face difficulties in teaching classes with Roma children. Despite some positive gains from the offered training, they mainly appeared pessimistic about the change that the training has offered to their way of teaching. In particular, they appeared to believe that Roma children will keep having a lot of absences from school which will continue to accumulate learning difficulties and that Roma pupils and the rest of the pupils will resist to collaborate. This disappointment was reflected in several comments:

*I will continue to resolve problems that might relate to the strategies I use or will use from those I gained from this training as I did always: through practice and experience; doing by trial and error. (teacher 1).*

*I will continue to handle such problems in my standard way: with understanding and patience. (teacher 5)*

## **Discussion**

After centuries of exclusion and then segregation in separate schools, educational policy towards Roma has been led to a reinterpretation of the idea of equality, departing from formal egalitarianism and arriving at some form of multiculturalism. Nevertheless, despite the rhetoric around equality of opportunity and inclusion in which 'Every Child Matters', children from Roma communities continue to remain the lowest achieving minority groups in many countries in Europe and in Cyprus, in more specific. In fact, national policies on inclusion are not easily implemented. Schools often strive to become more inclusive within educational systems which focus on abilities and achievement and fail to recognize the destructiveness of prejudice and the exclusion which follows a denial of difference. Thus, the implementation of egalitarian policies and the enforcement of Roma schooling arises as a major challenge mostly for classroom teachers.

Marc and Bercus (2007) suggest that government policies and local programs on improving Roma inclusion in education must be coordinated and work in coherence with each other: appropriate national policies must be aligned with actions at the local level, ensuring at the same time adequate institutional and financial means to allow implementation of such policies. In many cases, policies and programs fail to have an impact because of the absence of an adequate policy framework or because they underestimate the very strong negative incentives built into the education systems and the level of institutional changes needed.

Project INSETRom was developed against the background of insufficient participation, unequal access, and barriers faced by Roma in education. This project aimed to break through the indicated cycle of social exclusion, perpetuated through

lack of educational integration of Roma children, indicated by several research studies. To achieve this, the participating institutions offered a holistic training package, including firstly, a needs assessment; secondly, a training curriculum based on these needs; and thirdly, teacher training. Such an approach towards teacher professional development aimed to escape fragmented, non-coordinated efforts, currently implemented in several countries, to face problems related to social inclusion, xenophobia and racism.

The outcomes of the training, as reflected in participants' accounts, indicated the training offered helpful but not adequate in addressing teachers' overall concerns on Roma issues. Even after the provision of the training sessions offered, most teachers continued to lack sufficient knowledge and confidence to work optimally with Roma children and indicated the need for further training in view of practical everyday classroom challenges. These results appear in line with those of other studies that pointed to teachers' need for support in dealing with Roma students. For example, Trentin et al. (2006) underlined teachers' concerns about the difficulties of implementing integrated schooling and reported a medium level of willingness towards integration; only teachers with a favourable attitude towards Roma but without direct experience in integrated schools, reported willingness to make a personal effort to contribute to the integration project and significantly underestimate the burden of the added workload. Similarly, in a study on inclusion as a process of recognising and minimising the barriers to learning and participation of all children, Pecek et al. (2008) indicated that teachers -as the key players in implementing inclusion in practice- needed to adapt teaching methods and the curriculum to make the school more interesting for Roma children and become themselves more familiar with Roma culture and history (Kyuchukov, 2000); thus, teachers needed to be trained and sensitized to the language and culture of Roma.

Teachers' responses in this study, similarly to other studies (Craig et al., 1998), indicated the need for such forms of training that are directly linked to classroom practice and focus on the practical level. Towards this end, in a critical ethnographic inquiry on teachers' responses to a series of new regulations on markedly increased student diversity at a Spanish school, Teasley (2005) pointed to alternative means, such as action research, for producing professional commitments more conducive to socially and culturally responsive educational processes. In this regard, "bottom-up" input fuelled by teacher support and enthusiasm -now often challenged by lack of coherence and coordination- can be generated. Thus, appropriate structures ensuring that such input is channelled to education authorities in sophisticated, visible, reliable and structured ways need to be established.

In addition, teachers could benefit from closer relationships with the Roma community. In fact, community participation has been the cornerstone of several successful projects that have resulted in improved school performance, significant decrease in drop-out rates and decrease of interethnic conflicts within the school. Programmes, such as the 'Learnery' project (Messing, 2008) and the 'Cambridge Project' (Greenfields and Home, 2006), report on partnerships between schools and communities. Usually, Roma parents tend to be less involved than other parents in schools because to their own low level of education, their perception that they will not be heard, or the lack of time and resources. Low parental involvement, as shown by a number of Roma education projects can change very rapidly: if parents get the

minimum support and explanation required through outreach programs such as school mediators, their attitudes change rapidly. Roma organizations and staff provide excellent intermediaries between non-Roma organizations and the Roma community and often make excellent role models, which can show relatively closed communities that integration does not necessarily mean losing one's identity and exposing oneself to discrimination. Thus, a community oriented educational approach with high levels of community involvement can help teachers deal with everyday challenges related to Roma inclusion. The families can play a critical role as a source of knowledge, while parents' stories can be an important source for discussing the history of Roma, as well as their cultural and traditional values in the classroom.

## **Epilogue**

Despite the diverse political, social, and educational situations existing in various countries, as well as divergent experiences among different Roma groups relating to the education process, the insights gained through this project have contributed to a better understanding of what it takes to facilitate inclusive practices, enhancing Roma educational participation. In specific, results of the current study have pointed to the importance of teacher training linked with needs-based interventions at the school level that can improve teachers' understanding of Roma history and culture and enable them to respond to the challenge of teaching in classrooms with Roma children. The results of this study hold implications for the design of future training, in particular, sustainability as well as transferability of the underlying principles in different school contexts.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Goals of the Modules

MODULES	GOALS
Culture and enculturation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to understand others' ways, beliefs and values by understanding OUR ways, beliefs, values</li> <li>to understand how OUR ways, beliefs and values etc. are taught to, and learned by young members of a culture (or part-culture), and if, and how, along such process changes are made, or introduced by the learners.</li> <li>to understand that the process of enculturation is a lifelong process.</li> </ul>
Stereotypes and prejudices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to reflect on stereotypes and prejudices in order to assess to what extent and in what way these stereotypes and prejudices influence their teaching and their relationships with students and parents.</li> </ul>
Roma history and Roma Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to understand that Roma history is implement part of Europe / World history.</li> </ul>
School Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to understand that schools and classrooms are cultural environment organized and regulated by cultural ways, beliefs and values that are both specific of the contexts and connected to the wider society and culture. To analyze the continuity or discontinuity among the micro/meso/macro socio-cultural levels.</li> <li>to reflect on how WE have at different times imagined and constructed (or reified) the cultures of others in music, literature, visual arts and movies, with particular regard to Roma people.</li> </ul>
Intercultural education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to comprehend that diversity is a characteristic shared among most of the societies.</li> <li>to get acquainted with the principles of intercultural education: empathy, solidarity, intercultural respect, and obliteration of the nationalist way of thinking.</li> <li>to comprehend the notions: parity of cultures, parity of the educational and cultural chapter of the fellow being, equality of opportunities, social cohesion.</li> </ul>
Classroom Management and Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to be aware of the different teaching methodologies that enhance inclusion in the learning community</li> <li>to develop understanding and empathy of the experiences of Roma children within the context of the school</li> <li>to challenge stereotyping</li> <li>to develop strategies to deal with racism, prejudiced attitudes and potential conflict</li> <li>to develop awareness of language issues with respect to enhancing the learning experience in general</li> <li>to develop practice in terms of facilitating the learning and language development needs of pupils learning the dominant language as an additional language alongside dominant-first language speakers.</li> <li>to begin to choose and use language within the school and classroom environment that reinforces the inclusiveness of the context and to reduce conflict and associated behaviours.</li> <li>to make decisions about the use of environmental print as a source of learning but also to reinforce respect for multilingualism and feelings of belonging, for example what are the most important words to include in different languages such as: dining hall; cloakroom; 'welcome'</li> </ul>
Curriculum Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>allow teachers to reflect on how they have taught about Roma issues in the past and/or taught their Roma students</li> <li>present teachers with national curriculum guidelines and targets</li> <li>help teachers reflect on how they can integrate the various modules they have been exposed to in training sessions into their teaching and the development of future curriculum and lesson plans</li> <li>work with teachers on identify key and secondary aims when teaching about the topics that are the core of the INSETROM project</li> </ul>
Teacher-Parent Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to develop teachers' ability to enhance Roma parental involvement in school and to prepare and organise the context for a conference or meeting with Roma parents and to effectively use communication skills when they meet Roma family members.</li> </ul>