



Supporting Motivations to Intervene on Learning and Experience

Introduction

One of the first main objectives of the SMILE project is to bring to focus the existing reciprocal prejudices and to reveal and analyze the main problems related to Roma children schooling. All partners in the SMILE project have conducted a survey in their own Country collecting data on the integration of Roma and non-Roma children. They have also set up focus groups with Roma/non-Roma parents and school staff and applied the Moreno sociogram to gather results and define the basis to assess the impact of the lack of social inclusion from an educational point of view, and to set a starting point to help defining training materials for facilitators, educators and for the direct beneficiaries of the SMILE project.

Results in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is the country with the highest percentage of Roma people although in actual numbers the Romani are more numerous in Romania.

According to the 2011 census 325,343 individuals identify themselves as Roma, that is 4,9% of the total population. Their exact figure is not known. According to a research carried out by the Bulgarian institute Open Society their number is estimated at around 426,000; some experts also suggest they could even be around 600-650,000 – but it is questionable that so many people really identify themselves as Roma. The Romani are the third largest ethnic group in the country bound to become in 2050 the major ethnic group. They are present in all Bulgarian provinces and the number of locations, albeit most of them small or middle size villages and towns where Romani people are more than 50% of the population, has risen. Many Roma leave the country temporarily, looking for a better life in other European countries taking their children along with them thus interrupting their education.

Results in United Kingdom

The population of migrant Roma in the UK has steadily increased since the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in the European Union. While exact figures are not known, one recent report in the UK suggests that there may be up to 200,000 migrant Roma living in the UK, although more conservative estimates put the figure at 80,000. The UK response to the Roma population is piecemeal and positive work is often done in locales, with little to no formal structures in place on a national scale to support Roma integration. Manchester has been particularly credited with innovative practice in supporting migrant Roma to settle in the city - particularly with regard to education - although recent austerity measures put this past work and any future initiatives at risk. The SMILE project has facilitated a research report that is a comprehensive and contemporary analysis of the situation of Roma in the UK and in Manchester.

Results in Italy

In 2012 Italy adopted the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Travellers, sponsored by UNAR, the National Bureau against Racial Discrimination. The document calls for the adoption of intervention measures for more general policies of social inclusion aimed at improving the living conditions of Roma people focusing mainly on four areas: education, employment, housing and healthcare. In this framework the SMILE project and the prosocial approach can be very useful.

Following the desk research conducted by AIZO, the Centro Studi Villa Montesca set up a focus group with 18 primary school teachers in order to assess the level of understanding and apply prosocial behaviours. Since the main problems regarding Roma children schooling, as pointed out by the teachers, are absenteeism, early drop out, need for an additional education support and supplementary aid, underachievement,

Results in Croatia

The City of Koprivnica has conducted a survey on the situation of the Roma and their relationship with the educational system. There are several reasons whereby the exact number of Roma living in the Republic of Croatia is difficult to establish since some choose to identify themselves as members of other ethnic groups and owing to their migrating patterns. According to the 2011 official census the percentage of Roma living in Croatia is 0,40% (i.e. 16,975 individuals).

During the course of the project experts were interviewed and asked their opinion on the situation of Roma in society and above all about the integration of Roma children in elementary schools. Findings were later confirmed by the Moreno sociogram based on the analysis of the children's drawings. The results show that in our target class there is a very positive climate between Roma and non-Roma children. School staff constantly work on integration and the level of socialization among children is very good.

We therefore feel that we can proceed to carry out further research along these lines to develop models which can improve the integration of Roma children and parents both in the educational system and in the community.

As a consequence children either miss classes or turn into early drop-outs. The SMILE project research was carried out in one of the big Romani settlements in Kyustendil, South-West Bulgaria, which has, according to local Roma activists, about 12,000 Roma inhabitants. In the past most Romani children attended the local segregated school, a situation that has significantly changed in the last 10-15 years with more Roma children attending mixed schools. The SMILE research has studied the educational environment in a mixed class (Bulgarian-Roma-Turkish) in a 2nd Primary school located outside the Roma suburb. The research applied sociogram activities to assess the level of friendship in the classroom and the extent to which Roma students were accepted by their fellow students from a different ethnic origin. A focus group with teachers and parents was set up in order to highlight the perceptions and the areas for improvement. Video interviews with 2 experts enriched the findings about the current situation and the potential for improvement through the introduction of prosocial educational models.

Interviews with two Roma 'experts' have clarified the need for inclusive and creative practice and the need to work in partnership with Roma communities. A sociogram activity with a class of 7 year old pupils at Moston Lane Primary school has shown the complexities of classroom friendships, and has particularly highlighted the need for good attendance so that relationships can be formed in school and children can flourish. Conversations with the children reinforced the positive attributes of a playful and prosocial model of working. Consultations with parents and teachers have highlighted the welcoming atmosphere of this diverse school, however particular initiatives around volunteering and English classes for parents were identified as measures that could further benefit the inclusion of Roma parents as well as their children.

problem of integration, lack of participation of the Roma families in the school life, the prosocial approach is seen as a valid method for stimulating dialogue among students, teachers and parents, promoting motivation as well as a positive relational climate in the classroom in order to increase the level of socialization among all peers.

The Moreno sociogram was then used to assess how the non-Roma children perceived their Roma classmates and vice versa.

The results showed a very low level of cohesion within the class: in particular, the Roma children resulted marginalized and in some cases even isolated or ignored. It will be interesting to know how the experimentation of the SMILE prosocial approach will change this difficult situation.

Results in Belgium

Due to the lack of data collected on the basis of ethnicity, it is estimated that there are about 30,000 Roma in Belgium, accounting for 0.29% of the total population. As in other European countries, the Roma in Belgium very often face socio-economic difficulties and a strong anti-Roma sentiment fuelled by widely spread stereotypes and discriminatory practices and attitudes. Marginalisation and exclusion are the very consequences of a vicious circle that consistently affects their daily life and results in them being one of the most vulnerable communities. The SMILE project has enabled the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) to initiate research and on the ground activities to analyse the depth of this phenomenon in the field of education. To this end, ERIO has organised a number of activities such as desk research on the historical and social dynamics involving Roma and non-Roma in Belgium. The main findings of this research were confirmed by two experts who were interviewed by ERIO and who pointed out the difficulties faced by Roma children in terms of education. Having overcome a number of refusals from schools as well as administrative and 'ethical' obstacles, ERIO then lead more specific on the ground activities, starting with an exercise involving Roma and non-Roma children and continuing with a group discussion with Roma/non-Roma parents and school staff at l'Ecole Arc-en-Ciel in Brussels.



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