

Research report Phase 1 (2015) ROMANIA

This report summarizes the outcomes of the research conducted by Fundația Română pentru Copii, Comunitate și Familie (Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family) in 2015, that have emerged while running the "Inclusive School is sChOOL – Learn and live together in democracy" project.

Phase 1

In 2015, the research activities included:

1. The literature for the school inclusion has been reviewed.
2. The methodology and data collecting tools were designed.
3. Four schools from the North-Western Region of Romania have been studied based on their inclusion level. The research focused on inclusion policies and practices at school level.
4. Main Findings
5. Challenges and Aspects to Improve

A. Definition and features of inclusive education

Desk research

Our main target was to explore the theoretical background and former researches dealing with inclusive schools/inclusive education. We read and analysed the already existing research materials in Romania, the INCLUD-ED and EPASI projects and other international bibliography. We discussed the understandings about the INCLUD-ED and EPASI projects via shared working documents and Skype meetings.

First of all, we focused on the results of the INCLUD-ED project (Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe from Education, CIT4-CT-2006-02863, a project supported by the European Commission). Then we studied the national teams' recommended professional literature (articles, books, publications, research studies, provided by NGOs, think tanks and research organisations) about inclusive school. The Romanian bibliography is not quite up to date. We have a few (not many) studies and good practice guides that have been achieved mainly over the period 1998-2011.

In the Romanian context, there is little commonly agreed practice about the inclusive education. Inclusion is a desirable subject, at first sight, every official representative speaks in good terms about it. In fact, there is no evidence of a real interest of how inclusive policies are implemented in real school life.

The educational system, the discourse, educational policies, practice and literature of inclusiveness are strongly focused on children with special educational needs (and not on socio-economically disadvantaged children, like poor, ethnic minorities or geographically marginalized children).

Definition of inclusive school

Using the information that has been already studied and shared, the national teams together agreed on the theoretical framework, criteria, and indicators to be used in the research.

Inclusive education is the type of education responsible for ensuring the right to education of all children, without any discrimination, focusing on ensuring quality education. It aims to provide optimal learning conditions that give every child the chance for an equal start in life in terms of education.

Inclusive education fights against school leaving, school dropout and school failure through measures that go beyond the material, personal, family or social barriers which children are facing.

Inclusive education is based on the following principles: equal rights, non-discrimination, equal opportunities in education, focus on the child, early intervention, ensuring support services, cooperation, and partnership.

It supports and confirms that all children are able to learn and that they need a form of support for learning. It aims to identify and minimize the learning barriers.

It is more comprehensive than usual formal education, including family and community education, as well as other educational opportunities outside the school.

The Inclusive School involves the widening of the goal of a regular school, transforming it in order to be able to respond to a greater diversity of children, especially marginalized, disadvantaged children and/or children excluded from education.

The Inclusive School involves a constant process of improving educational institutions, with the aim of improving human resources in order to reduce school dropout and social exclusion.

The Inclusive School/ Education offers unconditional access and adequate response to different educational needs of all children, in order to harmonize learning differences, differences in educational attainments and to provide an efficient education for all.

Principles assumed by the inclusive schools:

- ✓ Inclusive education is based on the concept that every pupil has the right to get an education on the basis of equality of opportunities.
- ✓ No pupil can be excluded from education or discriminated on grounds of race, religion, colour, sex, language, ethnicity, disability etc.
- ✓ All pupils can learn and benefit from education.
- ✓ Schools should adapt to the needs of pupils, not the other way round.
- ✓ Individual differences between pupils are a source of richness and diversity; they do not represent a problem.
- ✓ Children develop a positive understanding of both self and others. When attending classes which reflect similarities and differences between people, they learn to appreciate diversity.

B. Methodology and Research Process

The Argentinian team (CIPPEC) elaborated the document describing the conceptual and operational definition of inclusive school, including the selection criteria/indicators, and the instruments for conducting the fieldwork in each of the selected schools. As a result, based on our final definition of inclusive school, an indicator system was elaborated and adapted the best fitting models to the national particularities.

First of all, we agreed that **the first selection should include schools** which fulfil the following pre-requisites:

1. Schools are attended by *disadvantaged pupils* (or they are located in neighbourhoods where disadvantaged population is significant).
2. The pupils' *average learning results* (based on scores reached in standardized tests) *are higher than other district schools* with similar socio-economic and cultural background.
3. School indicators of *access to education* (entrance, dropout and repetition rates) *are better than other district schools* with similar socio-economic and cultural background.

The initial fieldwork showed that in Romania there is a lack of available indicators for schools (especially in the case of the first two criteria), or the existing ones were not reliable. Therefore, each team adapted the selection process to the specificity of the country, keeping in focus the common definition and criteria for an inclusive school.

The selection of the inclusive schools was very difficult, because there are not/we do not have access to standard indicators, quantitative comparable data among schools to rank them according to composed variables. We could only consult the results of the PISA tests (Programme for International Student Assessment / the most recently published results from the assessment in 2012), and a Unicef RO Study report (Analysing the situation of out of school children in Romania, 2012).

The statistical data of the educational units are centralised on county level (by the County School Inspectorates) and depend very much on their willingness to share them in public in spite of the fact that there is a law which makes compulsory the transparency and availability of data collected by the public sector.

In the counties where we work, FRCCF has an annual agreement with the County School Inspectorates; still, we could only get some recommendations according to our criteria and the permission to perform the research in the selected schools.

As a result, we decided that the qualitative methods were more efficient in establishing the most inclusive schools. We had to obtain the information on how inclusive are each school's practices from qualitative instruments built upon the main features of these practices at the school level.

First of all, we have chosen two cities to work in: **Cluj-Napoca**, because the desk research showed that this city was one of the two pilot locations where inclusive education was introduced as concept and practice (see *Integration projects in the community of SEN children* initiated by the Ministry of Education in Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara, in 1992). The second location chosen was **Satu Mare county**, because this one used to have one of the highest rates of school abandonment (especially in pupils aged 14- 15), and also because it is inhabited by multi-ethnic population.

According to the agreed methodology, we established contacts with intermediate actors of the education system (inspectors, supervisors – see **Annex J**) and performed interviews with other specialists that have contact with schools (teacher trainers, NGOs, social workers, etc.). This way, we were able to identify eight schools with (presumably) socio-economically disadvantaged population, and where both learning results are good and repetition/dropout rates are low.

After establishing telephone contact with the selected schools' principals in order to get initial information on the real presence of inclusive practices at schools (using the *Survey for school principals* - **Annex A**), and inquiring about their willingness to participate in this research, **we selected four schools**: two in the city of Cluj-Napoca and two in Satu Mare county (one school in a small town and one in a village).

We will refer in this report to four and in the final comparative report only to three of the four selected schools in order to keep the balance with the other countries/ the congruence with the other countries (to comply with the rules of the other countries).

The following instruments have been designed by the Argentinean team to collect information related to inclusive practices, through the views of different actors of the school community. There were **10 semi-structured instruments** to be translated and adapted to the Romanian context.

Eight of these instruments were applied during research visits to schools (field work) **Phase 1**.

1. Survey for school principals - Annex A) – selection phase: 6
2. Interview for school principals/deputy (Annex B): 6
3. Interview for teachers (Annex C): 14
4. Interview for parents (Annex D): 16 (8 interviews and 8 in a focus group)
5. *Survey for pupils (Annex E)*

6. Focus groups with pupils (Annex F) : 5
7. *Guide for observation of lessons (Annex G)*
8. Guide for observation of recreational time (Annex H) : 2
9. Interview for school special educator /psychologist / social worker (Annex I): 10
10. Interview for representatives of the County School Inspectorate (Annex J): 2

We mention that in the **Phase 1** of the research **we did not applied Annex E, and Annex G**. These were re-constructed and adapted to the second phase of the research.

C. Presentation of the schools

Institutional settings

Horea School is located in the central area of Cluj-Napoca Municipality (the most important town of Transylvania, with 304,000 inhabitants), facilitating access of children from surrounding areas of Cluj-Napoca to the school. The school is ranked as “city-centre school”, having a potential academic performance similar to famous schools in Cluj-Napoca. This is a public school, which offers classes to pupils from grades I-VIII, daytime type of education, in two shifts. The **756 enrolled pupils** have the opportunity to study with qualified teachers, 43 in all, most of them have higher didactical qualification level and a significant experience in teaching and in this school (17-19 years in teaching is the average). The school benefits from two psycho-pedagogues (special educators) named support teachers, a psychologist, named school counsellor, and a speech-therapist. In this area, there are several secondary schools and high schools. When we asked parents about their reasons in selecting this school for their children, they mentioned the well-prepared and dedicated teachers, as well as the safe, caring, and supportive atmosphere.

Secondary School No. 1 Carei – “School 1”, as everybody calls it, being the first school in the city. It is a traditional public school in Carei, a small city with 40,000 inhabitants situated at the Romanian – Hungarian border. It is a multi-ethnic community formed of Hungarian, Romanian, Roma and German (Swabian) population. The school is considered by parents as an institution which offers quality education to their children, but its major strength is the fact that it offers a three-language instruction, ensuring a diversity that not many other schools in the county could offer. **489 children** attend this school in one shift. The school has strong collaboration with the local authorities, this being one of the main reasons why we considered a good practice example of inclusion. There are two teachers in the school who facilitate the children’s activity, namely the school counsellor and the support teacher. According to the school executives, they are important pawns in the school life, given the 15 children with SEN who ~~are~~ enrolled in ~~the~~ school this year.

Culciu Mare Secondary School located in Culciu Mare village, the centre of the Culciu Commune, at approximately 16 km away from Satu Mare, the capital city of the county. The 4,000 inhabitants are Romanian, Hungarian and Roma. It is a public school which coordinates four other school structures: the kindergartens in Apateu, Corod and Culciu Mic and the Lipău Primary School, as well as two sections – kindergartens in Culciu Mare and Lipău. **228 children** attend the school in one shift. The headmaster has three years of seniority in the position and four years of

seniority in the school. The teaching staff consists of 22 permanent teachers and three substitutes, all of them having the necessary qualifications. Teaching activity is facilitated by other specialists working with children, teachers and parents. The school counsellor has a 6-hours weekly program, not enough to the real needs of the school, but even so, her activity is perceived to be very important for the whole school community. There is also a support teacher dealing with the disabled children, as well as a school mediator in charge of children coming from disadvantaged families.

Rebreanu School in Cluj-Napoca is a neighbourhood (district) school situated in a so-called semi-peripheral area of the city. There are other five secondary and high schools in the area that might compete with this *school* for pupils' enrolment, still, this school has the second highest number of pupils due to its good fame. It occupies two buildings with 38 classrooms, cabinets, labs and a sport hall. **813 children** attend this school, in one shift. The school program is in one shift and it offers a free semi-boarding system for 30 primary school children, consisting of teaching, support for homework, individual activities and recreational program. Each school cabinet is endowed with audio-video equipment. There is a psycho-pedagogical counselling and school guidance cabinet, one paediatric cabinet; one dental cabinet; school library; sports room. 62 qualified teachers are working here. Integrated education is ensured by two support teachers, who provide supplementary programs for children with learning challenges, also psycho-pedagogical counselling and speech therapy is provided by the school psychologist and the speech therapist. The school has a long **tradition** inherited from the headmaster before the current leadership and greatly appreciated by the present director who believes that this long experience determined the present leadership style.

Socio-economic context

The selected schools are granting equal chances to all children, they are not only inclusive by name. Pupils are enrolled regardless of their socio-economic situation, family or cultural backgrounds, or ethnicity. They are children from heterogeneous contexts where the socio-economic level varies between higher and lower social strata. While in some families they get support for better performances, in others they do not enjoy even the fulfilment of their primary needs so they hardly can participate in the school activities.

Diversity is one of the most often mentioned pupils' strengths by teachers and parents, which proves that the selected schools are on the right way to become truly inclusive. The difficulties faced by most of the children are rooted in their financial situation and family background /problems: broken families, improper living conditions, domestic violence, and neglect, lack of parents' education, unemployment, or poor health. Some children face attention or communication deficit, learning or behaviour problems, etc., some have long distances to travel to reach school, some did not attend kindergarten. Sometimes there are noticeable differences, there are children who come from preparatory classes and can read, others, e.g. those from Roma colonies who cannot even hold a pencil.

D. Main findings

School management – Frame for inclusion

The Board (Administrative Council), the school headmaster and the deputy headmaster are the **management team** of all the Romanian schools in the public sector. They are responsible for coordinating all matters pertaining to school mission, school governance and management, educational leadership, standards and procedures, national accreditation, human resources, professional development, communication, budget, and other matters related to administration. There are several educational management structures, such as the educational counsellor, the heads of departments and the curriculum committees – whose members are elected according to their experience and results.

Given the regulations of organization and functioning, the headmaster coordinates regular meetings with and between teachers. The main role of the *Council for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CQEA)* is to ensure that the school's strategic objectives and action plan are consistently followed /applied, the activities fulfilled, and at school-year end it prepares an Annual Internal Self-Evaluation Report which is submitted to the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education.

Teaching councils are organized regularly, each month or even more often, upon request. They deal with specific issues, like the national school regulations (ethical codes included), school/term evaluation reports, optional curricula proposals etc.). There is an effective internal communication among all interested parties. The headmasters talk on a weekly basis with the teaching staff, speak with the pupils, in all the four schools they are very involved and accessible. Both teachers and pupils can enter any time in their offices. There are *mentoring/inter-assistance procedures* too; one of the most important issues the teachers face during the early stages of their career being the lack of experience and of good practice models, so they very much appreciate this opportunity.

The main concern of all the four school headmasters is to impose the best interests of the child for all the stakeholders (teachers, parents, etc.). Also, in each of the selected schools, the headmasters have a raised interest for everything happening in the school, so they analyse the facts on the spot, collecting the information from the children, parents and teachers as well. The school headmasters put neither bureaucracy (“papers, documents”) nor image (“reputation, media, publicity”) on the first place, instead they want things to really work in the benefit of the children and that all involved persons to be satisfied. Their vision is to ensure that schools are functioning in harmony with their purpose, so that pupils should find their place in life, be ready for life and be able to earn their living.

The vision of the *Horea School* is representative to the ideal situation expected from the public schools in Romania: “... to give every pupil an opportunity to ethically and brightly contribute to an educational society”. In *Culciu Mare*, the headmaster succeeded to convince the staff to

consider every pupil as an individual: “...we are trying to develop the personal abilities, to direct him/her to the point where his/her skills are; our school is able to offer any child, no matter of nationality, economic situation or family, the chance of being educated and prepared for life in the way so he/she will be able to find his/her own path.” In *Carei*, the main concern of the headmaster is the quality of the teaching activity: “... ensuring a good environment for study and for development, monitoring absenteeism, classroom discipline, communication with parents and effectiveness of extracurricular activities”. In *Rebreanu School* those who have been serving in school for a long time do appreciate the management team’s interest to create an open and positive school atmosphere, which is a specific tradition of this school. This school has been promoting an assumed inclusion policy for a long time, which also has become a well-known tradition to the stakeholders. It has been one of the inclusion pilot schools in Cluj through running the programme ‘The Romanian School - Inclusive Environment’ in the 90’s.

What is really important is that all these schools promote, quote, and treasure their vision.

The most time consuming tasks of the school management teams are the ones about paperwork. Some of the staff are saying that the ideal percentage of a headmaster’s work should be 80% teaching and 20% administrative tasks, but usually the exact opposite happens. The real activity of a school headmaster consist of 70% of administrative tasks; the other tasks (conflict mediation, audiences for the children’s family members or teaching activities) are done depending on the time left.

School atmosphere

Horea School in Cluj-Napoca has a welcoming looking with the children’s drawings decorating the school walls, and a lot of green spaces. The green schoolyard has a large open space to play ball, run around or play outdoor games. All the teachers are convinced that the children are offered an atmosphere favourable for learning, for feeling good and safe. The children’s drawings displayed everywhere express joy and the well-being feeling in school. There are some armchairs and small tables on the corridors where they have a chat, read or eat a sandwich. One of the preferred places is the school library where children have peace and quiet or they can talk to the librarian lady about their personnel issues and concerns. Sometimes children stay more in school because of their home conditions: “There are many children who stay here, with us, after classes, because they have improper conditions at home, no heating source or electricity, no one to talk with.” Teachers also have the opportunity to socialise in a relaxed atmosphere in the coffee or tea room and have a “welcome talk” when they enter the school, which they appreciate very much. The school has recently introduced school uniforms at primary school after a long process of consultation with parents and children who consider them very “cool”.

In *Culciu Mare School*, the working atmosphere is pleasant, „like a second home”. The emotional climate is a good one for the pupils; the children feel comfortable and open when communicating with the teachers or other personnel in the school. For the strangers who enter the school, the positive climate is visible from the first moments, being very friendly, inspiring, and challenging. The climate of trust is built over time and for teachers, this process includes the planning and

organizing of extracurricular activities, which provide learning experiences and beautiful memories for the children who live in a quite closed world. One of the teachers says that it is important „...to enter into the classroom with joy and to love our job ... when you enter and you see the children’s smiles and their faces you feel glad.”

In *Carei School*, all reports on school atmosphere were made on a very positive tone. Enthusiasm characterizes each story meant to talk about the general mood in the school. There is an open relationship between teachers and pupils, even in cases they do not teach at all grades. The Math and the Romanian language teachers come regularly in the primary classes in order to know the pupils before they enter the secondary school. This School is *an atypical* one, given the coexistence of three lines of study in three different languages: Romanian, Hungarian, and German. The children in the three sections are engaged in activities so as to create the possibility to communicate to each other. Their reaction is favourable, they enjoy multicultural activities. The teachers mention how important it is in primary classes that children learn to enjoy themselves at school and come to school with pleasure. “If he/she enjoys and feels comfortable, he/she will learn easier, but if he/she comes to school with stress and without pleasure, fearing the primary school teacher or not feeling good in the classroom, with the feeling that anything can happen, or he/she is not safe in here, that he/she is not loved, then the whole learning process will be compromised.”

In *Rebreanu School* in Cluj-Napoca all the interviewees mentioned the following strengths of the school: very good teaching staff, good collaboration between them and the school management, positive atmosphere, support teachers, generous space, school close to the children’s residence, computers and projectors supplying, good reputation. Children’s drawings express their joy of feeling good in school.

Teachers – every day models for inclusion

Romanian schools are characterized by a large stability of the staff, especially in cities and in the so called good schools. This is an advantage in the case of dedicated staff but it can be a great obstacle in achieving school performance. Teachers are appointed by the County Inspectorate and the headmaster cannot assign and dismiss them.

Teachers’ meetings of are held regularly, on a schedule established at the beginning of the semester and any other time whenever a specific need intervenes. Teachers’ council meetings take place each month, based on a management plan of the council. Activity programs for each curriculum area are established, as well as counselling sessions with the specialized inspectors or pedagogical groups.

Some of the meetings are focused on administrative issues, topics related to the organization of the school activities, but there are also debates regarding absenteeism or school dropout. These topics are particularly important for the schools working with larger disadvantaged communities (e.g. Roma children) and lot of work needs to be done in order to prevent early school leaving. The result of the discussions, planned and carried out regularly, is transparency.

The headmaster of the *School in Culciu* explained why it was so important to be transparent about anything regarding school: “Since I have become a headmaster ... I told my colleagues to come to discuss with me any problem. If they do not like the reaction, they will have the right not to come the next time. I told them to challenge me and then they will see that, no matter what, things can be discussed with me, even the more delicate decisions. We take these decisions discussing in the teachers’ council; everybody tells his/her opinion and finally we take the conclusion, but the most important thing is to discuss; and another good thing is that even the persons who do not agree on a decision, they admit that at least things are made transparently, according to the legislation and common sense.”

In *Horia School* the favourite way of communication between management team and staff is the informal one, which contributes to everyone’s “wellbeing”. There is a *mentoring/ inter-assistance procedure too*, one of the most important issues facing teachers during the early stages of their career, which they very much appreciate by the staff.

In *Rebreanu School* teachers have two nice rooms (one in each building) where they permanently have free coffee and tea and they can have a chat whenever they feel the need to talk about children or personnel issues. *Regular monitoring between colleagues* is much appreciated by all who attended the interview. The quality of teachers is appreciated by all respondents as very good, and the good school institutional culture being even better than in central schools which are considered elite schools.

Time management in the teaching activities is a transversal competence acquired during the career and can make the difference between a successful activity and a less successful one. It is often stated about the Romanian education system that is overloaded in terms of learning contents and this aspect has not been corrected despite repeated reform efforts. This means that every teacher is forced to decide either to cover the program or to perform lessons in which the modern and active teaching methods will involve the pupils more and more. Generally, the use of time is purposeful. Depending on the possibilities to cover the content which should be taught, sometimes recuperation/compensatory programs are needed and teachers allocate time for such activities also, which generally are common for the exam disciplines, but they are additionally working with children who wish to go in a so called “bilingual class” in high school. These are free consultations made even with only two or three children, when they need to catch up on some lessons.

Equitable distribution of pupils and teachers in classrooms is an important characteristic of a school striving inclusion, since every child is given a real chance to be included in any of the classes and it eliminates selection on various criteria. All the school management teams researched say that this has become a sensitive issue, a more recent concern because of the growing parents’ pressure. Similarly, there are teachers or class masters who would like to work only with children who demonstrate high intellectual level, good behaviour, and /or increased motivation for learning.

In Horea School, the management team decided to equally distribute the children, but keep in mind their preferences, too. If there are children with more difficult social backgrounds or different ethnicities, they are more careful to assign them equally. The practice shows also a kind of differentiation depending on how famous a teacher is, as parents would prefer him/her for their children. The headmaster must take this into account too, as this is the reason why they came to this school. *In School No. 1 from Carei*, the basic criterion for allocating teachers to classes is the language of teaching, given the organization of the educational process on three lines of study, and then continuity, given that if a child gets used to the teaching style of a teacher, he/she will better assimilate knowledge.

In all the four schools, inter-active teaching methods were introduced, also most of the teachers make permanent efforts to adapt curriculum to everyday-issues since they are aware of the value of practical knowledge. There are working procedures for low academic performance children and for SEN children, too.

It is recognized in all the four schools that if teachers work as teams and their messages are congruent, they will get good results. What they would need more, is time enough to meet and discuss, training and team building opportunities.

Inclusion - as school policy

Support teachers are working in classes, close to the children, or in their cabinets – friendly places where children enter with pleasure. The minimum need for such teachers would be four SEN children, but it is an ideal situation which is far from being granted in any school in Romania. The number of the support teachers should be greater taking into account the increasing number of children with various learning or behavioural disorders (ADHD, dyslexia, various forms of addiction). Financing is ensured according to the number of pupils attending school. A coefficient is added for the SEN children and the number of children per support teachers should not be greater than 12, even though in reality, their number is greater.

Another problem is that the definition of children with special needs is scanty: the law accepts only physical disabilities and mental deficiencies related to IQ or memory, attention deficiencies being excluded. The child with ADHD is not recognized as a child with SEN, so teachers cannot be paid accordingly. Also, the children with behavioural problems or in poverty, who need more stimulation, require more time and patience, do not fall yet in this ratio. Not all the pupils benefit from personal educational plans, only those who are registered with SEN. However, there are psycho-pedagogical records (observation, evaluation) for the youngest children and compulsory on-line records for children in preparatory school. Individual plans are made by the support teachers and the other teachers have also been involved in this process. Though the majority of teachers would like parents' involvement, strategies are set up together with the teachers who are teaching at the child's classroom, not with the parents, because there is no social worker to do this effectively. Children and families may have many social problems that teachers cannot always know or address.

While it is obvious that there are steps to be taken for the school to become full inclusive, not quite all of the staff members are supporters of this approach. For example, some of the teachers have mentioned as **weakness** the fact that the school is too open to children with special needs, behavioural problems or who cannot reach top academic performance. They try to oppose inclusion policy promoted by the school management.

Pupils – In the focus

Approaching the social and family problems of the pupils should be based on the cooperation with the parents, which is not always the best. The ethnical and religious diversity of the children in the *Culciu Mare School* (Romanians, Hungarians and Roma) is used by the teachers to introduce and study the idea of equality. The discussions, examples, models are used not to create a knowledge base but to build character in pupils: it is very important, because at home, the parents either have no time, either they do not know or they are not able to explain these issues to their children, so there should be supplementary work in the school on this aspect. Sometimes, class masters get to know very delicate, unpleasant issues about the children's families. These overwhelming problems impact children who tend to hide them from fear, shame or think it is their fault. While the school counsellor has little time for such subjects, the class masters are those who do their best to facilitate and solve these problems that can limit the child's success in school and later life. Records on children's socio-economic backgrounds are not available, so sometimes it is very difficult to help in due time.

In the context of numerous cases of absenteeism of the Roma children, *School No. 1 from Carei* decided to engage in a dropout prevention project funded from the local budget. The project targeted disadvantaged pupils enrolled in the Hungarian section (both of Roma and Hungarian ethnicity children) and it was implemented in partnership with an NGO and the Social Work Department from the City Hall. In this project, children from the target group (preparatory class and primary classes from the Hungarian line of study) are given a hot meal at lunch, and after dining at the soup kitchen, the children come back to school and continue the preparation for the next day. The teachers involved in this project receive overtime payment for two hours per day. Two persons were supplementary assigned to this school: a school mediator, involved in maintaining school discipline, especially during classes, a school cleaner for the children from the Hungarian line. The children included in the project as direct beneficiaries were taken twice a week at the Social Centre for a complete sanitation, including washing up their clothing, "... to get used to these skills". According to the school headmaster, this was a vast project that was intended to be extended to the other lines of study for children coming from dysfunctional families, disorganized families or families with social problems. After more than four years of project implementation, the number of dropout cases has been reduced to zero, all the pupils being in school.

An educational project of great importance for *Culciu Mare Secondary School* was the "Come to school!" project financed by UNICEF (a three year project). The project focused on the disadvantaged groups, children who were at high risk of school dropout. During the life cycle of the project, the relationship with the parents improved while the school mediator succeeded to

facilitate the relationship with the Roma community. The benefits for the pupils arose from several directions, for example the teachers improved their working methods with disadvantaged children, the parents realized that school is important and they have to make all the possible effort to send their children to school, also the children involved in different activities which helped them love school.

The headmaster In *Rebreanu School* of mentioned that children have many ideas, like taking the initiative, and are asking for activities. The school is implementing a Big Brother program in which older children take care of their younger colleagues, feeling responsible for their safety and well-being. The school is also innovative in applying a method designed to help children pass from primary school to secondary, when a peak dropout is recorded.

In *Horea School* it seems to be a **model of good practice** the fact that the teachers/ class masters ask for other pupils' consent to apply different procedure to children who need it, especially when they evaluate the academic performances.

School – parents – community relationship

The selected schools have different views on how to communicate and collaborate with the parents and/or the community. In all the four schools **parents** are invited to attend their children's classes, to participate in designing and organising the major school-events, to be more implied in school-life.

In the case of *Horea School*, as inclusion is a policy commitment assumed by the institution, community openness is one of the most important objectives. This is primarily visible through its “**open door policy**”: the two exterior doors and the access door to the building are unlocked, unlike other schools in Cluj-Napoca; however, school is strictly supervised by teachers and pupils on duty and the security guards. Parents can wait for their children on benches in the schoolyard, and if they want to meet the school principals or teachers for an urgent problem, they have direct access to the building without having to schedule in advance. Pupils can also come to the offices of the two managers whether they want to ask something, solve a problem or they can meet their teachers for different issues.

Teachers from the *School No. 1 in Carei* believe that teachers are the major influencing factor of the relationship between the school and parents. In their opinion, the parents are open to communication, but the school has the power to initiate the process. The teacher is the one who should plan everything and if he/she succeeds, the relationship will be very good. The primary school teachers consider that the relationship with the parents is gradually created and that should rely on a team for supporting the child in the learning process. In this view, they need two years to educate the parents: two years for the parents to understand how they have to support their children in the learning process and their personal development, and other two years until the child becomes what he/she should become at this stage of existence. It is a long, consistent and well planned process, which does not stop here, but which should be understood and accepted from the beginning as keys to a successful work.

In Culciu Mare School, the interviewed parents described school in terms of safety, performance, community, and communication. They know that when their children are in school, they are safe, they are looked after, which is very important, especially in case of the younger pupils. The children have a companion on the bus, when they get down, they are accompanied. Communication is very good, and parents like this very much; any problem should they have, they can call and discuss with the teachers and class masters. They are available for the parents, they listen to their opinions and answer questions. The parents agree on the fact that pupils are feeling well in this school. The children feel alright in a pleasant environment for them, they like easier school days, as they have not so much homework to do and are not too busy for playtime.

In *Rebreanu School* regular meetings with parents are held at least two times per semester. Teachers say that, generally, mothers are the ones who are more involved in their child's education and achievement. Also, it is typical of parents to be more involved when their children are smaller, then they lose their interest, and that is why school needs to diversify the methods and ways of collaboration in order to keep the parents closer. Another method was to set up a permanent "school for parents". The school psychologist developed such an activity by announcing the themes in time, a successful way about getting parents involved. The school also allows parental visits during lessons, but many parents do not use this opportunity. Some of the class masters organize trips, picnics, birthday celebration parties, etc.

As for the involvement of local authorities, NGOs, and companies in the children's education and school life, the number of projects implemented in partnership with the selected schools is higher than in other similar schools. What is needed is to connect permanently the schools to the community life. Recently the Ministry of Education initiated a program called "School Other Way": during one week, children are involved in extra-school activities, visiting, theatres, Botanical gardens, companies, offices of local authorities, airports, etc. This program works well in cities, but in smaller communities (small cities, villages) the opportunities are minimal.

Success ingredients in the selected inclusive schools:

- Schools that are on their way to inclusion are characterized by the widening of their objectives as opposed to a regular school, transforming themselves in order to be able to respond to a greater diversity of children, especially marginalized, disadvantaged children and/or children excluded from education.
- School headmasters' commitment to inclusion is essential. They should mobilize their staff and insist to use every day, every moment the principles of inclusive education.
- As for the implementation of the inclusive policy assumed by the school management at classroom and pupil level, there are some agreed practices with the teachers which differs from school to school. E.g. in *Horea School* in classrooms with SEN children, support teachers are those who have the responsibility to explain to other pupils in the classroom (at the beginning of the school year) why and how support teachers or other school-staff will work differently with them and ask their consent and support for this.

- The school atmosphere in all the four schools is particularly warm, welcome, and friendly, aimed at children's' and teachers' development, progress as well.
- These schools fight against school leaving, school dropout and school failure through measures that go beyond the material, personal, family or social barriers which children are facing.
- Most of the teaching staff of the selected schools believe that all children are able to learn and that they need a form of support for learning, so they aim to identify and minimize the existing learning barriers.
- *Culciu and Carei Schools* and their practices of inclusion are more comprehensive than usual formal education, aiming family and community education.
- Schools are striving to adapt to the needs of their pupils and not vice-versa.
- Children enrolled here learn to appreciate diversity and are encouraged to treat each person with respect.
- The schools included in the research are all using individually designed practices in order to support every child in his/her learning process.

Challenges and aspects to improve

- Increase quality of in-service trainings for ALL the staff in the school so as to include and fully accept the principles and values of inclusive education.
- Improve communication with each family and increase the parents' motivation to active participation in the school life.
- Teach the children how to learn, maximizing their own strengths and controlling their weaknesses
- Ensure the sufficient number of support teachers/helping people for SEN children.
- Use of differentiated evaluation of every child, not only of those which are registered as SEN children.
- Children feel safe and happy in schools, but they would like to have more freedom to interact with others in their environment, to be more respected and heard.
- Elaborate and implement within the school a variety of projects or activities on inclusive education, focusing on partnerships with families and communities.