PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT MODEL

Project:

ASPIRE4R (Achieving Success through Peer-to-peer Inclusive Vocational Education for Roma Students)

Prepared by: RIC Novo mesto.

Content

Introduction

Peer to peer support model is one of the ASPIRE4R project results, which is strategically designed to be used as a comprehensive manual for organizations and volunteers who will support Roma students in vocational education. This documment embodies the collective efforts and aspirations to empower Roma students, pave their way into the labor market, and weave the fabric of inclusivity within the Roma community.

About the project

Project Title: Achieving Success through Peer-to-peer Inclusive Vocational Education for Roma Students

Project Acronym: ASPIRE4R

Project number: 2023-1-SI01-KA210-VET-000153030

Field: Vocational Education and Training

Project Start Date: 01/10/2023 Project End Date: 30/09/2025

Project lump sum: 60 000,00 €

Programme: Erasmus+

Action Type: KA210-VET - Small-scale

Project partners:

RIC Novo mesto, Slovenija (leading partner)

PRISM, Italy

ACTA Center, Romania

The ASPIRE4R (Achieving Success through Peer-to-peer Inclusive Vocational Education for Roma Students) project is an Erasmus+ is implemented within KA2 program, Small-scale partnerships in vocational education and training. Commencing from October 2023 to September 2025, this project is a collaborative effort among esteemed partners dedicated to fostering the integration of Roma participants into vocational education and training while facilitating their access to the labor market.

Project Goals and Objectives

Establish and Test Peer Support Model: Develop and implement a robust peer support model specifically tailored for Roma students within vocational education and training programs.
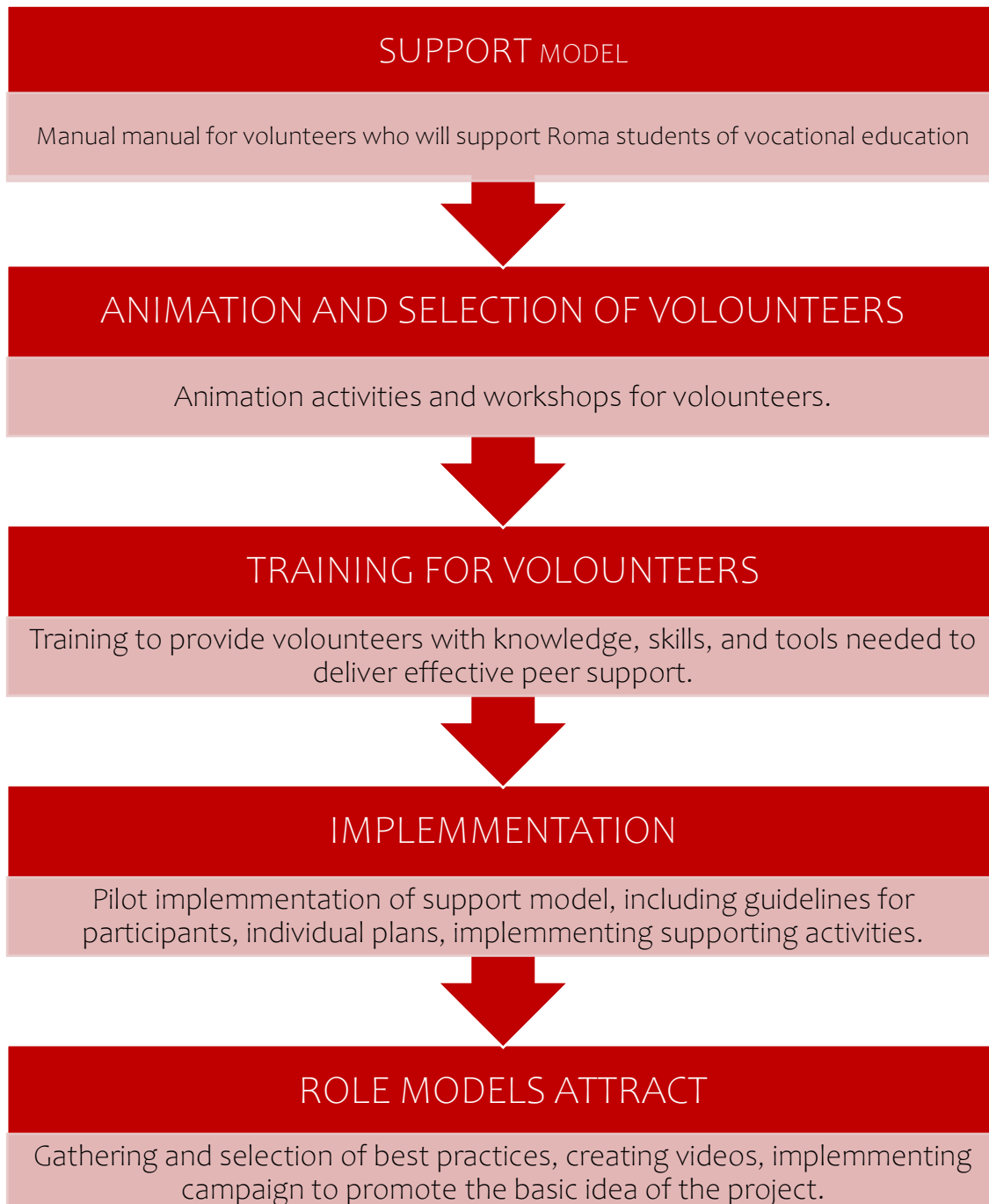
- Share Best Practices: Facilitate the exchange and dissemination of best practices, including the creation of impactful video narratives by Roma students and volunteers, to motivate and guide other Roma individuals to enroll in vocational schools post-primary education.

- Active Collaboration: Foster active participation and collaboration among Roma participants, volunteers, vocational education experts, school counsellors, and project staff at every phase of the project.

- Reduce Absenteeism and Streamline Education: Strategically reduce absenteeism among Roma students, streamline the educational process, and equip them with essential vocational skills necessary for success in the labor market.

- Empowerment Through Peer Support: Empower Roma participants and volunteers through a comprehensive peer support model, offering innovative learning approaches to enhance their employability prospects.

- Inclusive Educational Landscape: Contribute to reshaping the narrative around Roma inclusion in vocational education, creating an inclusive environment that supports and nurtures the educational journey of Roma students.

The ASPIRE4R project is a robust framework encompassing clear and attainable objectives. It's poised to establish and test a bespoke peer support model tailored exclusively for Roma students enrolled in VET programs. The significance of this endeavor extends beyond mere implementation—it's about fostering a supportive environment that transcends barriers, creating a beacon of motivation for future generations of Roma students to embrace VET schooling. This project's essence lies in the rich tapestry of storytelling by Roma students and volunteers, a unique approach aimed at inspiring and guiding others within the community toward VET enrollment.

Wider Impact

This document, while crucial for the ASPIRE4R project, transcends its immediate application. It's a testament to innovation, a playbook that could potentially influence and guide similar initiatives in

different organizations, extending its impact far beyond the project's temporal and geographical boundaries.

SUPPORT MODEL

Manual manual for volunteers who will support Roma students of vocational education

ANIMATION AND SELECTION OF VOLOUNTEERS

Animation activities and workshops for volounteers.

TRAINING FOR VOLOUNTEERS

Training to provide volounteers with knowledge, skills, and tools needed to deliver effective peer support.

IMPLEMMENTATION

Pilot implemmentation of support model, including guidelines for participants, individual plans, implemmenting supporting activities.

ROLE MODELS ATTRACT

Gathering and selection of best practices, creating videos, implemmenting campaign to promote the basic idea of the project.

Sofinancira
Evropska unija

Needs Analysis

Slovenia

RIC Novo mesto conducted a comprehensive needs analysis within the VET education framework at the GRM School in Novo mesto. The analysis encompassed a series of individual interviews and a focus group session aimed at understanding the unique requirements of 7 Roma participants in vocational education.

The outcomes of this analysis highlighted a prevailing sense of comfort and belonging among most participants within the school environment. Notably, many are satisfied with their social integration, establishing meaningful friendships both within the Roma community and among students from diverse backgrounds. This positive social fabric underscores the inclusive nature of the school, fostering an environment where students feel connected and supported.

However, despite the positive social dynamics, the analysis revealed a recurring need for additional support in navigating the educational process. Many participants expressed a desire for assistance in managing the intricacies of their academic journey, indicating a requirement for guidance in comprehending learning materials and negotiating school-related arrangements. This necessity for educational support signifies an opportunity to further empower Roma students by addressing specific academic challenges and facilitating their educational endeavors.

Moreover, a significant revelation from the analysis was that most participants expressed a lack of desire to continue their studies beyond the current vocational education level. This sentiment indicates a broader need to explore avenues to engage and motivate students towards embracing further educational opportunities or alternative career paths. Understanding and addressing this inclination not to pursue further studies is crucial in providing tailored support and guidance that aligns with the aspirations and preferences of Roma participants in vocational education.

Romania

In the pursuit of advancing social inclusion and promoting equal opportunities, the ASPIRE4R project stands for giving hope and opportunity to the Roma community, focusing on achieving success through peer-to-peer inclusive vocational education. At its core, this initiative seeks to address the unique challenges faced by Roma students within vocational education and training (VET) programs, aiming to create a transformative impact on their educational journeys and future career prospects.

Current Landscape and challenges:

The Roma community in Romania has faced longstanding challenges in accessing quality education. Our country recognizes the pressing need to comprehensively understand the multifaceted challenges faced by Roma students not only in VET programs but in school in general.

Among the challenges to be explored are the prevalence of absenteeism, systemic barriers within Romanian educational institutions, and the absence, or the very few tailored support structures for Roma students.

By reducing absenteeism, streamlined educational processes, and acquiring essential vocational skills, we envision a tangible transformation in the educational landscape for Roma students in Romania. Empowering Roma individuals through innovative learning approaches and contributing to a more inclusive environment, while considering the unique cultural context, are key outcomes that will be monitored and evaluated constantly.

Many Roma children in Romania face challenges in accessing education due to a variety of reasons. One primary factor is socio-economic vulnerability, as many Roma families live in impoverished conditions, making it difficult to prioritize education over immediate survival needs. Additionally, historical discrimination and marginalization contribute to a lack of trust in the education system.

Parents may be hesitant to enroll their children in school due to a range of concerns, including:

- **Economic Constraints:**

Economic constraints often compel Roma families to prioritize immediate financial needs over long-term investment in education, as many struggle with limited resources and view their children's contribution to household income as an urgent necessity for survival.

- **Cultural Mistrust:**

Historical discrimination and segregation have created a sense of mistrust towards mainstream education within the Roma community. Some families fear that their children might face discrimination or prejudice in school. The cultural mistrust extends to concerns about potential relationships forming between Roma girls and individuals from outside their ethnic group. The preference for endogamy, or marrying within the Roma community, can lead to apprehension about the potential for interethnic relationships developing in the school setting.

This cultural perspective may contribute to the reluctance of some parents, particularly fathers, to allow their daughters to attend school.

This cultural factor further compounds the challenges faced by Roma children in accessing education, as it influences parental decisions regarding school enrolment. The fear of potential interethnic relationships may be perceived as a barrier to cultural preservation, leading some families to prioritize traditional values over formal education.

- **Lack of Support Structures:**

The absence of tailored support for Roma students within the educational system can discourage enrolment. Families may feel their children will not receive the necessary assistance to overcome potential challenges.

- **Nomadic Lifestyle:**

Some Roma families maintain a nomadic lifestyle, moving frequently in search of employment opportunities. This mobility can disrupt in most situations children's consistent attendance in school.

- **Language Barriers:**

Differences in language and cultural practices between Roma communities and the mainstream education system can create communication barriers, leading to misunderstandings and discomfort.

Addressing these cultural dynamics is crucial in fostering a more inclusive educational environment. In other words, we recognize the importance of understanding and respecting cultural nuances within the Roma community to collaboratively overcome these challenges and promote equal educational opportunities for all Roma children.

Surveys and Interviews

Based on these informations from above, we crafted a questionnaire structured into three sections:
- The first section comprises questions focused on their experiences in the school environment and relationships with classmates.
- The second section of the questionnaire includes inquiries exploring ways we could support them, including through mentors, both from among their peers and teachers.
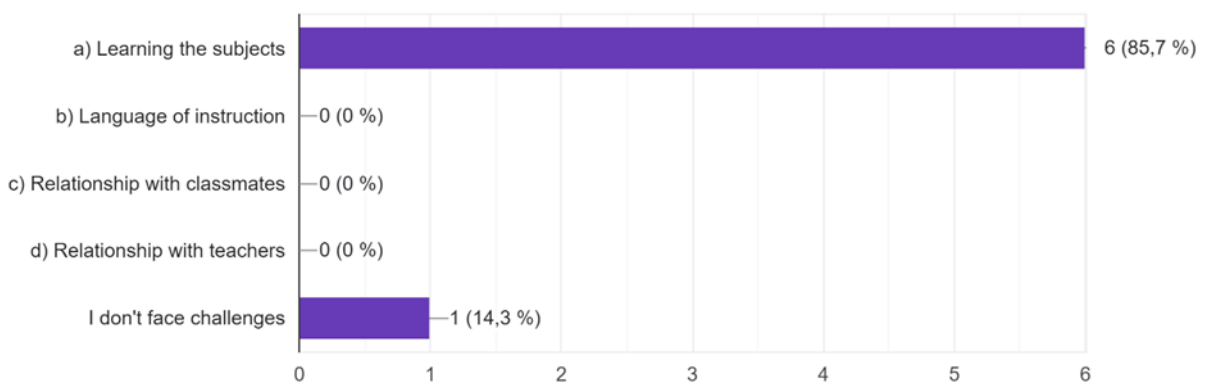
- Finally, the third section of the questionnaire addresses their expectations concerning motivations and aspirations, both from the educational system and life in general.

The survey gathered insights from seven Roma high school students who come from different classes. Among them, three were girls, and four were boys, giving us a diverse look into the experiences of Roma students.
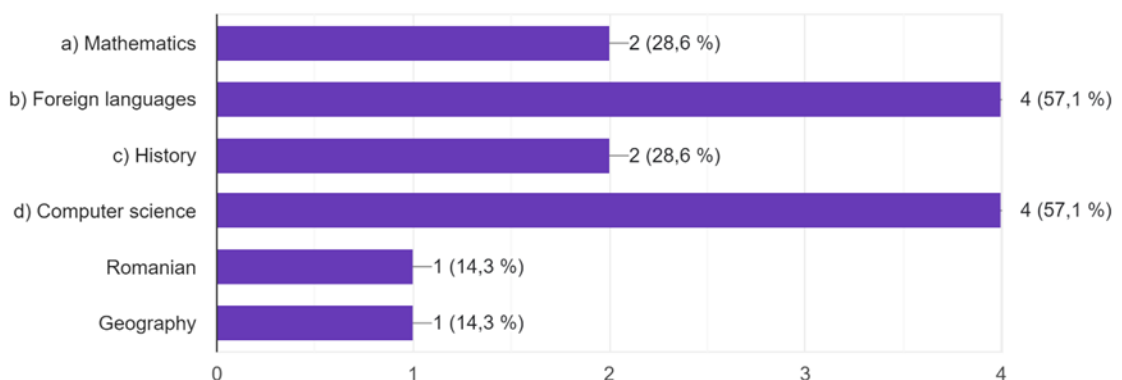
- The first section of the questionnaire comprises the first four sets of questions along with their respective responses:

1. What are the main challenges you face at school? (multiple choice)

|	
a) Learning the subjects	6 (85,7 %)
b) Language of instruction	0 (0 %)
c) Relationship with classmates	0 (0 %)
d) Relationship with teachers	0 (0 %)
I don't face challenges	1 (14,3 %)

At this question, 85.7 percent of the students answered that they face difficulties in learning the school subjects.

2. What subjects are you most interested in at school? (multiple choice)

a) Mathematics	2 (28,6 %)
b) Foreign languages	4 (57,1 %)
c) History	2 (28,6 %)
d) Computer science	4 (57,1 %)
Romanian	1 (14,3 %)
Geography	1 (14,3 %)

3. How do you perceive your relationships with your classmates in the school environment? (single choice)

- a) Extremely positively
- b) Positively
- c) Acceptably
- d) Negatively
- e) Extremely negatively
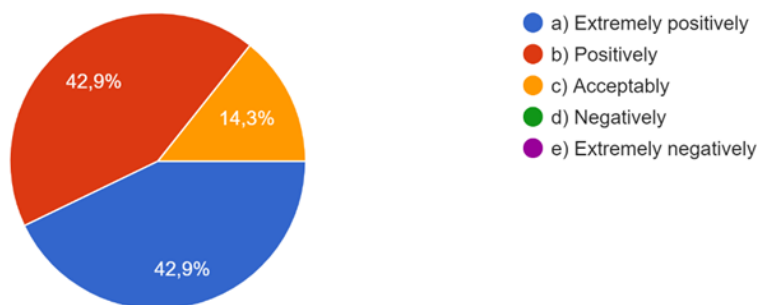
4. Do you feel supported by your classmates and teachers in your learning process? (single choice)

- a) I feel supported
- b) I feel supported to some extent
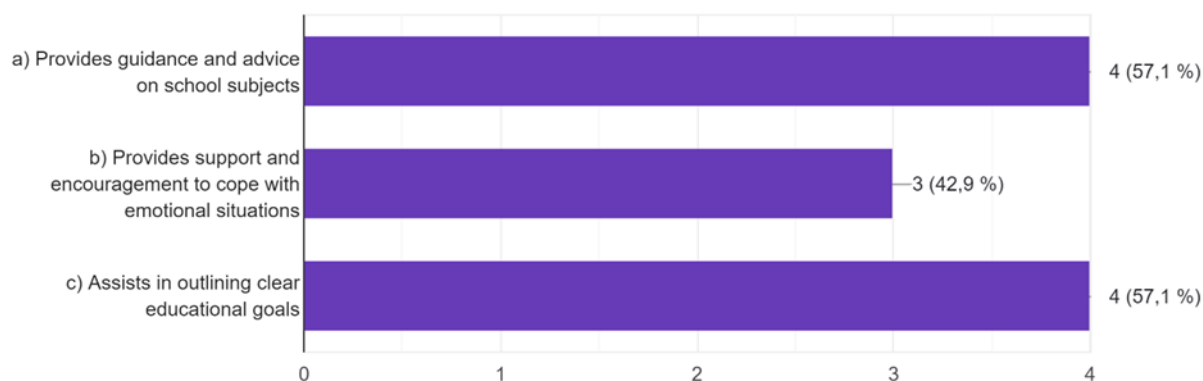- c) I do not feel supported
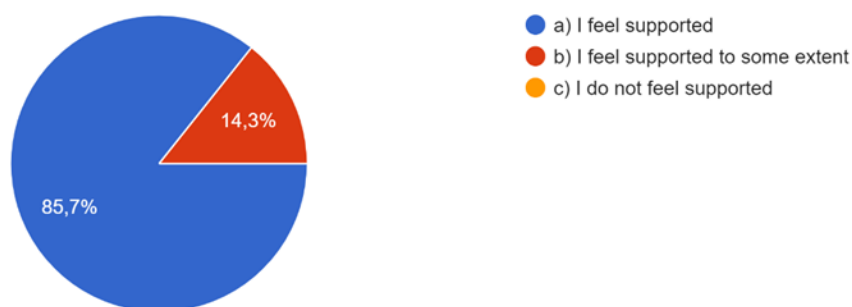
- The second section of the questionnaire comprises the following four sets of questions along with their respective responses:

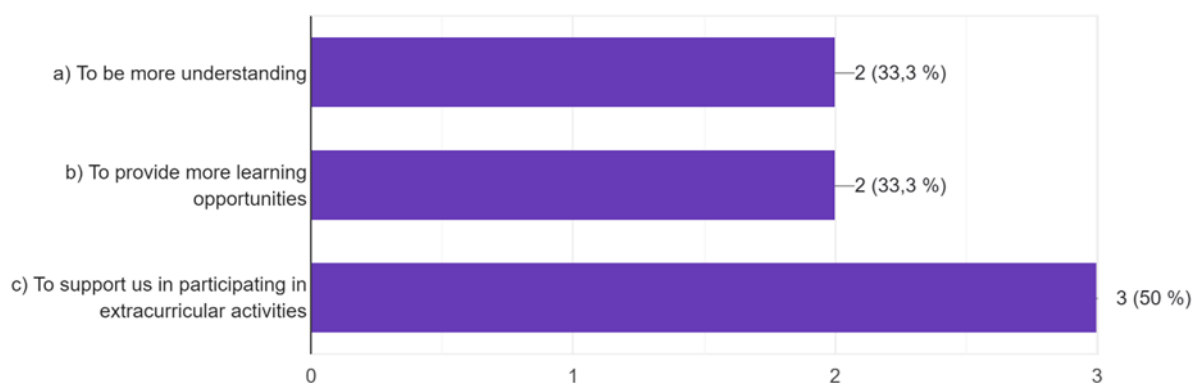5. Do you consider that assistance from classmates would be helpful in your learning process? (single choice)
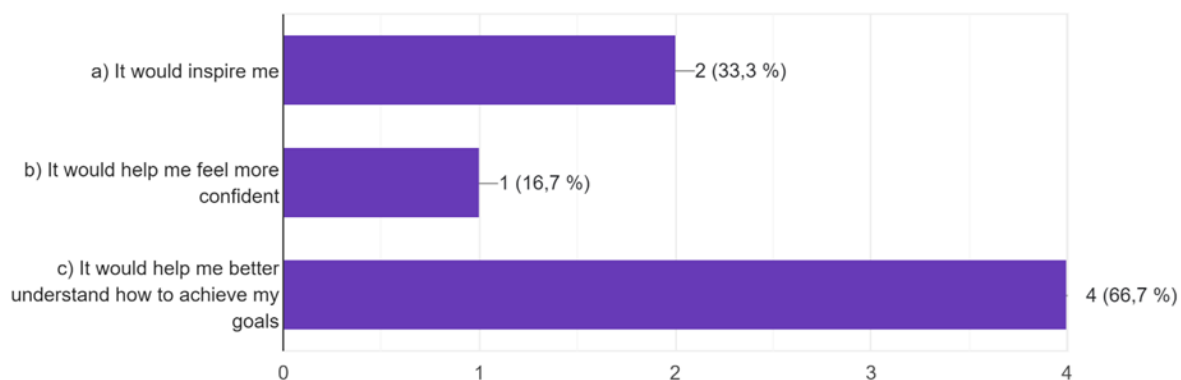

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure
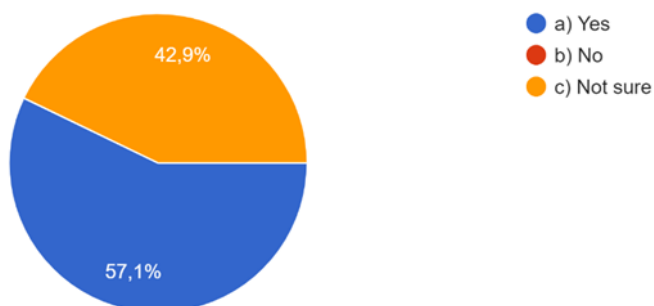
6. How do you think a mentor could support you in your learning process? (multiple choice)

- a) Provides guidance and advice on school subjects — 4 (57,1 %)
- b) Provides support and encouragement to cope with emotional situations — 3 (42,9 %)
- c) Assists in outlining clear educational goals — 4 (57,1 %)

7. What expectations do you have from teachers and authorities regarding support for students of Roma origin? (multiple choice)

- a) To be more understanding — 2 (33,3 %)
- b) To provide more learning opportunities — 2 (33,3 %)
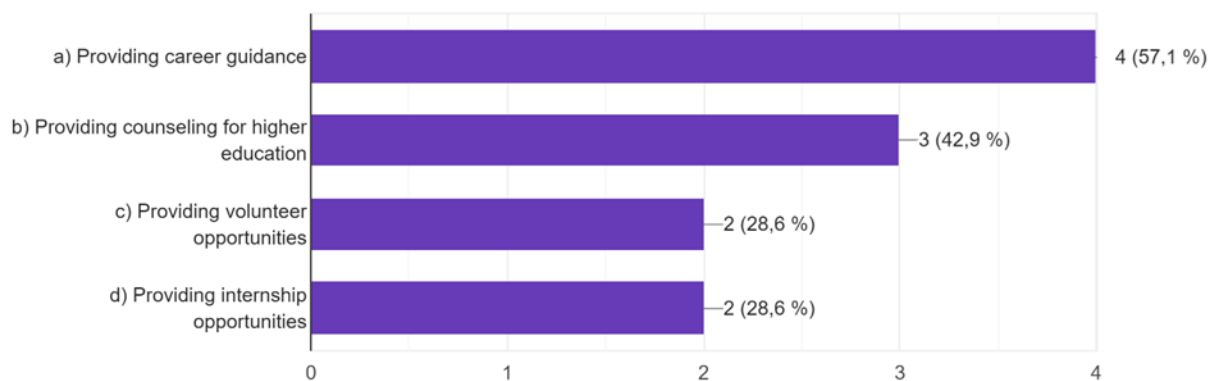- c) To support us in participating in extracurricular activities — 3 (50 %)

8. How do you think the success stories of other successful Roma students/people would help you in choosing a professional education? (multiple choice)

- a) It would inspire me — 2 (33,3 %)
- b) It would help me feel more confident — 1 (16,7 %)
- c) It would help me better understand how to achieve my goals — 4 (66,7 %)
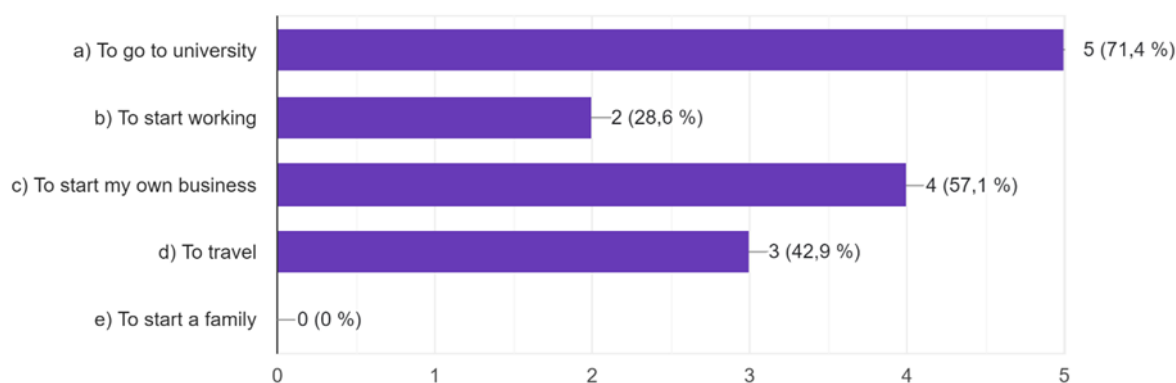
- The third section of the questionnaire comprises the last four questions along with their respective responses:

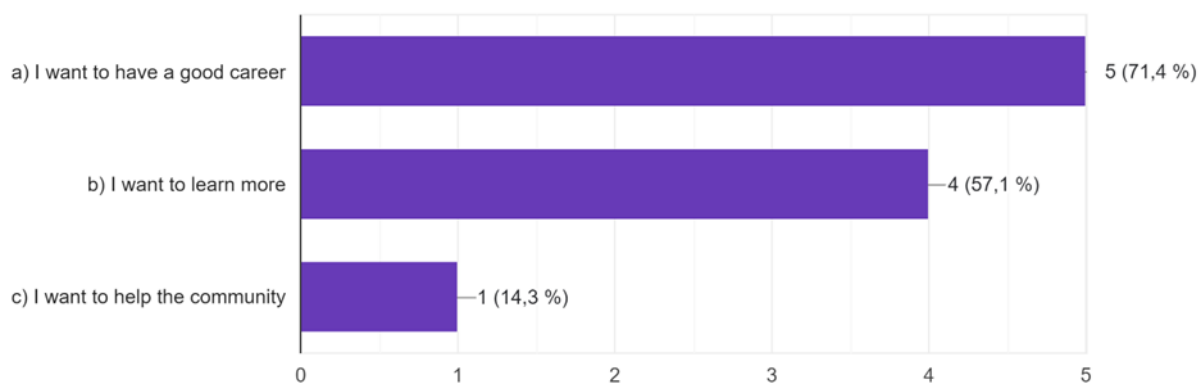9. How do you think school can help you integrate better into society after graduation? (multiple choice)

a) Providing career guidance	4 (57,1 %)
b) Providing counseling for higher education	3 (42,9 %)
c) Providing volunteer opportunities	2 (28,6 %)
d) Providing internship opportunities	2 (28,6 %)

10. What are your goals after graduating from school? (multiple choice)

a) To go to university	5 (71,4 %)
b) To start working	2 (28,6 %)
c) To start my own business	4 (57,1 %)
d) To travel	3 (42,9 %)
e) To start a family	0 (0 %)

11. What are your main reasons for continuing your studies after completing compulsory education? (multiple choice)

a) I want to have a good career	5 (71,4 %)
b) I want to learn more	4 (57,1 %)
c) I want to help the community	1 (14,3 %)

aspireK

Sofinancira
Evropska unija

12. Are there any other aspects you would like us to discuss to improve your school experience? (open-ended response)

> To have discussion about things that we will face after high-school

Because of the hesitancy to answer open to the last question we wanted even more to engage in a private interview with them.

The thorough approach of the questionnaires facilitated a comprehensive understanding, prompting us to conduct individual interviews with each participant. This allowed us to uncover and identify even more effective methods to support their educational advancement.

Within the framework of this report, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the data collected in the surveys, and we hope that this report can offer valuable insights into the research of the project.

Insights of the interviews

After conducting individual interviews with each student, it became apparent that the majority expressed a desire to continue their academic journey, with an implicit intention to pursue higher education. This reveals a notable level of maturity, seemingly influenced by challenging experiences within their family environments. This fortified maturity not only mirrors their strong character but also implies a profound understanding of the significance of education in overcoming obstacles.

Some of them aim to establish their businesses or explore different ways to secure better employment opportunities upon completing their studies. Concurrently, others aspire to contribute to their community, utilizing the acquired knowledge to support others. These diverse aspirations showcase a rich spectrum of goals and desires among these students, underscoring their varied interests and commitment to personal development and communal well-being.

Resources:

1. https://researchandeducation.ro/2023/02/15/roma-childrens-school-segregation-as-a-persistent-public-educational-system-issue-in-romania.html
2. https://www.agentiaimpreuna.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Studiu-comparativ-al-nevoilor-comunitatilor-de-romi-in-contextul-stabilirii-prioritatilor-strategice-de-interventie-pentru-incluziunea-sociala-a-acestora.pdf
3. https://childhub.org/ro/biblioteca-online-protectia-copilului/drepturile-copiilor-si-femeilor-de-etnie-roma
4. https://www.romaeducationfund.org/
5. https://scoala9.ro/harta-elevilor-inscrisi-la-orele-remediale-peste-10-mii-de-copii-sunt-numai/832/
6. https://www.rose-edu.ro/
7. https://dezvoltare-locala.frds.ro/proiecte-pentru-incluziunea-romilor/

Italy

This needs analysis is a product of desk research conducted within the scope of our ASPIRE4R project, reporting findings from existing research in the same thematic domain. It draws upon secondary resources to highlight the Italian experience, emphasizing significant policies implemented to tackle the integration gaps faced by Roma students in the school system. The insights derived from this secondary research contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and needs related to our project's objectives. The populations of Roma and Sinti in Italy, estimated to be between 130,000 and 170,000, make up a minor but noticeable portion of the population—just 0.23%. This group, which consists of recent immigrants as well as Italian citizens, deals with a variety of issues that are difficult to pin down. Remarkably, contrary to popular belief, 85–90% of Roma and Sinti people in Italy live sedentary lives. Merely 2-3% of them continue to live a nomadic lifestyle. Importantly, most of the population is young; 60% of them are under the age of 18, creating a demographic that includes 30% of people in the 0–5 age range, 47% of people in the 6–14 age range, and 23% of people in the 15–18 age range. These numbers highlight the potential benefits of focused interventions in social development and education. Furthermore, the Roma and Sinti communities exhibit a distinct demographic

structure, with only 2-3% of the population over 60, necessitating the development of sophisticated community support methods.

The RSC Strategy 2012-2020 highlights the need for analytical clarity by acknowledging that the Roma population in settlements does not fully represent the minority in Italy. It is imperative to identify the region of reference when analyzing the education sector. The scope was considerably reduced in the 2013/2014 study conducted by ANCI and Fondazione Cittalia, which identified about 30,000 Roma people living in settlements in municipalities with a population of more than fifteen thousand.

The Ministry of Education's publications provided the majority of the data on Roma and Sinti students' access to public education in the first ten years of the twenty-first century, despite criticism of the identification method due to ethical issues. The Ministry's focus on Roma and Sinti youngsters "recognized" by educational institutions, excluding those living in camps and leading to a skewed representation, has come under scrutiny following the suspension of the survey from the academic year 2016–2017. It is difficult to evaluate contemporary efforts for educational inclusion since there is a dearth of precise, aggregated data from recent years, even while out-of-date surveys confirm that low educational attainment is the main cause of the precarious living conditions experienced by the Roma and Sinti groups.

Stereotypes from the 1960s to the 2000s shaped survey techniques, which focused on the "nomadic pupil," primarily from "nomadic camps," and ignored those who remained socially invisible. Disaggregated data on education is out of date, and efforts to promote educational inclusion have been hampered by the nationwide survey's cancellation due to privacy concerns. The Roma and Sinti populations have long-standing conflicts with schools, which they view as "schools for others," although schools are where their children gather. It is possible to dispel unfavorable stereotypes, promote continued community education, and stop segregation by comprehending the difficult parts of schooling that Roma and Sinti youngsters endure. A political perspective on non-residence and access requirements is emphasized in proposals, which seek to guarantee equitable treatment for everyone, especially those from lower-class backgrounds. In light of the short- and medium-term consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic on the education of Roma and Sinti children—including difficulties associated with distant learning—more research and focused solutions are required. Surveys in particular attest to the declining trend in kids who identify as Roma or Sinti and their school attendance, which is made worse by the epidemic.

Cultural Sensitivity and Communication

Recognizing the importance of cultural sensitivity, the model underscores effective communication strategies between volunteers and Roma students. Volunteers will employ diverse methods to overcome language barriers and cultural differences, including visual aids, interactive activities, and community involvement. Building trust through positive relationships and open dialogue will be pivotal in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for Roma students.

Combatting Stereotypes and Promoting Inclusion

Volunteers actively engage in initiatives to combat stereotypes and prejudices against the Roma community. By exemplifying understanding, promoting intercultural acceptance, and advocating for equal inclusion, they contribute to fostering an environment of support, respect, and inclusion for Roma students. Volunteers collaborate with school coordinators, suggesting activities and participating in events to showcase successful Roma student examples, strengthening advocacy for equality and diversity in the school environment.

Methods and Strategies

Mentorship

Mentorship initiatives contribute significantly to creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere within the school. They encourage regular class attendance and actively promote a supportive community environment where cultural diversity is respected and celebrated.

Mentorship extends beyond academics, aiding in overcoming linguistic, cultural, and social barriers. It plays a crucial role in fostering understanding, respect, and inclusivity among students by embracing diversity.

Through mentorship, Roma participants gain access to various school resources and opportunities, ensuring their holistic integration into the educational framework. This facilitates a better understanding of different cultural backgrounds among students and encourages their active participation in school life.

Confidence building and motivation

Volunteers are instrumental in cultivating self-confidence and motivation among Roma students. Through regular mentoring, they actively engage students in school activities, reinforcing their self-

belief through every success. Establishing this rapport builds trust, emphasizing students' positive attributes consistently, laying a solid foundation for a strong bond and a burgeoning belief in their abilities.

Volunteers focus on identifying and nurturing the unique talents and interests of Roma students. By providing ample opportunities for expression and talent development, they instill confidence, encouraging exploration and growth. Simultaneously, they forge positive relationships, celebrating achievements and establishing trust, fostering belief in oneself among the students.

Volunteers raise awareness about inclusion and self-belief within the Roma student community. Emphasizing self-trust as pivotal for successful integration, they foster a culture valuing inclusion. This advocacy nurtures resilience and fosters a sense of belonging, reinforcing the significance of self-belief in school and the broader community.

Volunteers motivate motivating Roma students to actively participate and progress. Emphasizing consistent effort and perseverance in achieving goals, they encourage self-initiative, nurturing an environment fostering personal growth. Collaboratively, they define clear, achievable goals tailored to individual capabilities, guiding students towards academic improvement and skill acquisition.

Encouraging regular school attendance

Volunteers actively engage Roma students in diverse school activities, fostering an environment where successes become pillars of self-confidence. By participating and succeeding, students build self-assurance in their abilities.

A core aspect is developing trust through consistent positive reinforcement. Volunteers emphasize and celebrate the strengths and achievements of Roma students, nurturing a supportive relationship built on encouragement.

Recognizing and nurturing talents and interests is pivotal. Volunteers create platforms for Roma students to express their thoughts, ideas, and talents, thereby boosting their confidence and belief in their capabilities.

Volunteers raise awareness within the Roma student community about the importance of inclusion and self-belief. This understanding serves as a cornerstone for successful integration into both school and the broader community.

Volunteers collaborate with Roma students to set and achieve clear, achievable objectives. These goals revolve around enhancing academic performance, acquiring specific skills, and gaining experiences crucial for further growth and motivation.

Awareness of educational opportunities

Guiding Career Paths and Opportunities

Volunteers serve as essential sources of information for Roma students, providing insights into various professional, personal, and career possibilities. By imparting this knowledge, they aim to simplify the recognition of diverse paths and opportunities available after completing education.

Volunteers offer details on further education prospects, scholarships, financial aid, and educational programs, nurturing students' interests and career aspirations.

Volunteers play a pivotal role in encouraging Roma students to contemplate their future and personal career goals. They accompany students to diverse events and presentations, allowing direct exposure to various career options and educational pathways. Through this guidance, volunteers actively support the exploration and comprehension of multiple educational opportunities.

Volunteers build trusting relationships with Roma students, serving as a dependable support system. This personal rapport increases opportunities for assisting students in overcoming personal challenges such as stress, low self-esteem, and anxiety. Volunteers create a supportive environment, offering emotional backing both in school and home environments, fostering a "here and now" space to instill confidence and empower students to resolve other emotional challenges.

Volunteers, through their exemplary behaviour, contribute to fostering new behavioural patterns and boosting self-confidence among Roma students. Their positive influence significantly enhances the likelihood of students remaining engaged and committed to their educational journey, contributing to their overall confidence and self-assurance.

Academic support

Volunteers extend their support beyond emotional assistance to aid Roma students in their educational pursuits. They actively engage in helping with homework, assisting in grasping new academic concepts, and preparing for tests. This comprehensive academic support aims to bolster students' confidence in handling educational material effectively. Moreover, by offering this educational aid, volunteers create a conducive learning environment within both the school and home settings, fortifying students' academic performance and empowering them to overcome educational challenges.

Volunteers, as reliable sources of information, illuminate a spectrum of professional, personal, and career paths available post-education. They guide Roma students through various opportunities like further education, scholarships, and supportive programs, encouraging proactive consideration of future career goals. By accompanying students to diverse career-related events and presentations, volunteers actively engage them in exploring and comprehending potential educational pathways.

Cooperation with the community

Volunteers establish open and cooperative relationships with teachers, school counselors, and other educational professionals, tailoring approaches to support Roma participants. This collaboration involves regular communication, information exchange regarding students' progress and challenges, and joint planning of strategies that foster academic success and inclusion for Roma students. By understanding the school's activities, volunteers can actively engage with Roma students' involvement, ensuring their inclusion in various school initiatives.

Volunteers extend their involvement beyond school settings, engaging with the local Roma community to comprehend their unique needs and challenges. Seeking connections with Roma families, community leaders, and organizations, volunteers strive to bridge gaps and provide crucial information about available educational opportunities, scholarships, and support programs. By establishing connections within these groups, volunteers enable Roma students to actively participate in community life, fostering their understanding of social responsibility and promoting their integration into the local environment.

Volunteers actively encourage Roma students to integrate into the local community, fostering an understanding of social responsibility and solidarity. By participating in community activities and exploring educational and career pathways, Roma students gain practical experiences, develop various skills, and realize their potential within the broader community. This integration helps them acquire essential life skills like communication, teamwork, critical thinking, time management, and self-regulation, empowering them beyond their academic pursuits.

Training Program

TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS
ONLINE TRAINING PROGRAM for the selected volunteers. The training covers topics such as communication skills, cultural sensitivity, identifying and addressing challenges faced by Roma students, and building effective relationships with students, individual planning.
Training will be implemented by experts, volunteers with experience (5 volunteers from PRISM), project staff. This training will provide volunteers with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to deliver effective peer support.
ON-LINE IMPLEMENTATION of training for volunteers (Implemented 3 workshops x 4 hours of online training (total 12 hours training, 25 volunteers, 6 staff and VET experts)

TRAINING PROGRAM:

DAY 1: Foundations of Volunteering
Module 1: Introduction to Volunteering

-What is volunteering.
-Volunteer Code of Ethics.
-Progress monitoring and documentation.

Module 2: Embracing Diversity and Inclusion

-Understanding Roma culture and values.
-Mitigating cultural biases.
-Integrating cultural sensitivity into volunteer roles.

DAY 2: Personal and Social Skills
Module 3: Social Interactions

- Effective communicational skills.
-Cultural self-awareness.

-Accountability.

Module 4: Personal development for volunteers
-Handling stress.
-Personal development.
-Emotional intelligence.

DAY 3: Addressing Challenges and Fostering Relationships
Module 5: Navigating Educational Challenges

-Identifying educational barriers.
-Strategies to address socio-economic challenges.
-Collaborating with educational institutions for support.

Module 6: Building Effective Relationships

-Importance of trust and rapport.
-Individual planning for student success.
- Sustainable Mentorship Strategies.