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# GUIDE AND ACTION PLAN: FOR VET SCHOOLS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES FACING ROMA LEARNERS IN VET

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## **Introduction**

The aim of this Guide and Action Plan, delivered under WP2, action 2.4, is to increase the accessibility and attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET) schools to the Roma community, with particular attention to Roma learners. It builds on the Outreach Strategy implemented under WP2, action 2.3, across partner countries: Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Austria, and Germany, and is compiled by five national reports. These reports revealed diverse settings in terms of the popularity and affordability of VET schools and programs, factors that can serve as turning points for Roma enrolment. Interviews, workshops, and questionnaires that were conducted across the countries demonstrated consistently high interest in VET programs, while also exposing systemic barriers that make participation not accessible.

This plan responds by setting out specific objectives: reducing social, cultural, and informational barriers; improving communication and outreach; adapting learning materials; strengthening staff capacity; and building trust between VET schools and Roma communities. Structured around seven strategic areas, it outlines targeted activities and outputs designed to foster inclusivity, enhance visibility, and ensure that VET schools are perceived as welcoming, equitable, and culturally sensitive institutions. Ultimately, the Guide and Action Plan positions VET schools as agents of empowerment, capable of adjusting their programmes to more meaningful education open for vulnerable groups that are both economically stricken and are culturally excluded in the partner countries taking part in this research. Thus, building skills and competencies will help Roma learners to open more doors to the highly compatible job market.



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## 1. Action Plan

### 1.1. Specific Objectives

- i. Reduce barriers (social, cultural, informational)
- ii. Improve communication and outreach to Roma communities
- iii. Adapt learning materials and support systems
- iv. Strengthen staff capacity for inclusive education
- v. Build trust between VET schools and Roma communities

### 1.2 Key Challenges Identified

- i. Low enrolment and high dropout rates
- ii. Lack of culturally inclusive materials
- iii. Limited trust in institutions
- iv. Language and learning gaps
- v. Financial and social barriers
- vi. Lack of tailored student support

### 1.3 Strategic Areas & Activities

**Goal:** Enhance the visibility and inclusiveness of vocational education and training (VET) schools, ensuring that Roma learners perceive these institutions as welcoming, accessible, and culturally inclusive environments.

**Activities:**

- To achieve this, promotional and outreach strategies must be adapted to reflect both clarity and inclusivity. Materials such as brochures, websites, and social media content should employ simple, accessible language and incorporate visual elements that resonate with diverse audiences.
- The representation of Roma learners within these materials is essential, as it signals belonging and recognition. Where relevant, translation into community languages should be prioritised to reduce linguistic barriers. Beyond static materials, interactive approaches such as online information sessions for Roma families and communities can foster trust and engagement.

#### FINDINGS FROM GREECE

Access to vocational education and training (VET) in Greece reflects a complex interplay of barriers and support systems. Financial constraints are identified as the most significant obstacle, with a majority of participants emphasizing that program costs limited their ability to enroll.

Stakeholders emphasized that Roma students face multiple obstacles in accessing vocational education. But economic hardship remains the most pressing challenge, as many families lack the resources to cover program costs. Cultural discrimination compounds these difficulties, with some Roma students concealing their identity



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- Collaboration with Roma NGOs and community mediators is critical, as these actors provide cultural insight, credibility, and direct channels of communication between schools and families.

**Outputs:** The expected outcomes include the development of an inclusive promotional package that reflects cultural sensitivity and representation, alongside the implementation of a targeted outreach campaign. Together, these outputs contribute to reshaping the public image of VET schools, positioning them as institutions committed to equity, diversity, and the empowerment of Roma learners.

## 1.4 Adaptation of Learning Materials

**Goal:** Ensure that learning materials in vocational education and training (VET) schools are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of Roma learners, thereby fostering equitable participation and reducing systemic barriers to achievement.

**Activities:** This process requires a systematic review of existing study guides and curricula to identify areas where complexity or cultural bias may hinder engagement.

- Language and instructions should be simplified without compromising academic rigor, ensuring clarity for learners with varying literacy levels.
- The integration of culturally diverse examples is essential, as it validates the experiences of Roma students and situates their identity within the broader educational narrative.
- Visual and practical learning aids should be incorporated to support different learning styles, particularly for students who benefit from experiential and applied approaches.
- Collaboration with Roma educators and mediators can further enhance the relevance and authenticity of these adaptations.

**Outputs:** The expected results should include a set of adapted study materials that reflect inclusivity and accessibility, alongside the development of inclusive teaching guidelines. These outputs contribute to a pedagogical framework that not only addresses immediate learning needs but also advances long-term goals of equity and representation in VET schools. By embedding cultural sensitivity and practical accessibility

### FINDINGS FROM N. MACEDONIA

Certain findings show that the learning environment in N. Macedonia is not inclusive. As quoted by Roma learners, when it comes to teaching staff, some of them *"need training on how to work with us"* and *"should understand our culture and not have low expectations for Roma students."* The findings presented in the National report from N. Macedonia show a demand for VET programs, but certain proposals for improving the programs should include insight into the systemic barriers the Roma people face.



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into the curriculum, institutions can strengthen trust with Roma communities and improve both enrolment and retention outcomes.

## 1.5 Teacher Training & Capacity Building

**Goal:** Equip vocational education and training (VET) staff with the necessary skills and competencies to deliver inclusive teaching practices that respond effectively to the needs of Roma learners and other disadvantaged groups. This goal emphasizes the professionalization of educators as agents of equity and cultural sensitivity within the classroom.

**Activities:** The initiative involves the development of short, accessible online training modules that address key dimensions of inclusive education. These modules should cover pedagogical strategies for fostering equity, cultural inclusivity to Roma identity and experiences, and practical approaches to working with disadvantaged learners. The inclusion of hands-on tools, such as differentiated instruction methods, adaptable lesson plans, ensures that training is not only theoretical but also directly applicable to classroom practice. Collaboration with Roma NGOs and mediators can further enhance the relevance of training content, embedding authentic perspectives into professional development.

**Outputs:** The expected results include trained teachers who are better equipped to implement inclusive methodologies, alongside a comprehensive training toolkit that can be reused and adapted across institutions. These outputs contribute to the establishment of a sustainable framework for inclusive teaching in VET schools, reinforcing institutional commitments to equity and diversity. In the longer term, such training is anticipated to improve classroom dynamics, reduce dropout rates among Roma learners, and foster a more welcoming educational environment.

### FINDINGS FROM AUSTRIA

According to the survey results, 58.06% of respondents were aware of vocational education and training programs, while 41.94% were not familiar with VET opportunities. This highlights a need for greater outreach and awareness campaigns targeting Roma communities to improve their knowledge of available training options.

Barriers to participating in VET programs are: Roma A lack of information, financial constraints and training that often exceed the means of Roma families.

## 2. Inclusive and Culturally Sensitive Learning Environment

Across national reports, the need for inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environments in VET schools emerges as a consistent priority. In Greece, Roma learners face systemic barriers such as poverty, discrimination, and curricula that often fail to reflect their lived



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realities, leading to high dropout rates and social isolation. In North Macedonia, Roma students explicitly called for teachers to receive training on cultural awareness, noting that low expectations and lack of understanding undermine their educational experience. German and Austrian findings similarly emphasize the importance of embedding cultural sensitivity into teaching practices and institutional structures, highlighting that inclusivity must go beyond access to encompass trust, representation, and respect.

Creating such environments requires educators to be equipped with intercultural competencies, curricula to be adapted with practical and culturally relevant examples, and schools to actively engage Roma families and communities. Representation of Roma learners in materials and outreach campaigns signals recognition, while the involvement of Roma mediators and NGOs strengthens trust. Ultimately, inclusive environments are those where Roma learners feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed, with systemic changes ensuring that equity is embedded in both pedagogy and institutional culture.

### 3. Accessible Learning Pathways

Across national reports, Roma learners consistently emphasized the need for vocational education and training (VET) pathways that are flexible, practical, and responsive to their lived realities. In Greece, participants highlighted financial barriers, distance from training centres, and limited information as key obstacles, underscoring the importance of online options and adaptable program structures. In North Macedonia, learners called for pathways that prioritize practical skills over theory, flexible schedules for those balancing work and family responsibilities, and financial support to reduce exclusion. German and Austrian findings similarly stress the necessity of tailoring pathways to diverse learner needs, ensuring that programs are not only accessible but also relevant to employment opportunities.

Accessible learning pathways therefore require systemic adjustments: flexible delivery formats such as modular or evening courses, integration of hands-on training, and recognition of non-formal skills already present within Roma communities. Financial support mechanisms, including scholarships and stipends, are critical to offset economic pressures. Equally important is the creation of clear employment linkages, as through apprenticeships, internships, or guaranteed interviews, that make VET a

## FINDINGS FROM GERMANY

Survey results show that most Roma learners (52%) learn about VET programs through family and friends, with only a small share receiving information via schools, government agencies, or social media. While 42% rated program quality as good and 19% as very good, systemic barriers remain significant. Linguistic and bureaucratic challenges were frequently cited, with respondents stressing the need for integrated German language support. Financial constraints also persist, as low trainee salaries are insufficient to support families. Importantly, 61.9% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination when trying to access education or training.



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credible and motivating option. By embedding flexibility, cultural relevance, and tangible career outcomes, VET schools can transform pathways into genuine opportunities for Roma learners to participate and succeed.

#### **4. Overcoming Barriers to Participation**

Roma learners across national contexts face persistent barriers that limit their participation in vocational education and training (VET). In Greece, financial constraints were identified as the most significant obstacle, with many families unable to afford program costs. Social and cultural barriers, including discrimination and lack of culturally sensitive program design, further contribute to exclusion. In North Macedonia, learners emphasized that teachers often lack training in cultural awareness, leading to low expectations and limited support. Personal circumstances, such as childcare responsibilities or early school leaving, also restrict access. German and Austrian findings echo these challenges, pointing to systemic issues of institutional readiness, insufficient financial support, and the absence of Roma role models within VET institutions.

Overcoming these barriers requires a multi-layered approach. Financial support mechanisms—scholarships, stipends, and subsidies—are critical to reduce economic pressures. Teacher training in cultural sensitivity and inclusive pedagogy can counter discrimination and foster trust. Flexible program structures, including modular courses and accessible schedules, address the realities of learners balancing work and family responsibilities. Finally, partnerships with Roma NGOs, mediators, and local businesses can strengthen outreach, provide mentoring, and create clear pathways to employment. By tackling both structural and cultural barriers, VET schools can move toward genuine inclusivity and ensure that Roma learners are not only able to access programs but also succeed within them.

#### **5. Engaging Families and Communities**

Family and community engagement is a decisive factor in improving Roma participation in vocational education and training (VET). In Greece, respondents emphasized the importance of outreach efforts that directly involve families, noting that awareness campaigns and information sessions can build trust and increase enrolment. In North Macedonia, learners and stakeholders stressed the need for direct contact with Roma communities through neighborhood visits, collaboration with Roma NGOs, and the employment of Roma outreach workers who understand community realities. These approaches were seen as essential for overcoming mistrust of institutions and ensuring that information about VET opportunities reaches families in accessible ways.

German and Austrian findings similarly underscore the role of community-based strategies, pointing to the value of partnerships with local leaders, mediators, and NGOs in bridging gaps between schools and Roma households. Effective engagement requires not only



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communication but also the creation of supportive networks where families feel included in the educational journey. Community meetings, open days, and visible role models were identified as impactful strategies to foster dialogue and demonstrate the relevance of VET to Roma learners' futures.

Overall, engaging families and communities is not a peripheral activity but a central pillar of inclusive VET. By embedding trust-building measures, strengthening collaboration with Roma organizations, and ensuring that families are active partners in the educational process, institutions can create environments where Roma learners are supported both inside and outside the classroom.

## **6. Supporting Teachers and Staff**

Teachers and staff play a pivotal role in shaping inclusive vocational education and training (VET) environments, yet they often lack the preparation and resources to meet the needs of Roma learners. In Greece, stakeholders emphasised the importance of training educators in cultural sensitivity and equipping them with practical tools to counter discrimination and low expectations. In North Macedonia, Roma students directly noted that teachers “need training on how to work with us” and should better understand Roma culture, pointing to gaps in teacher readiness and institutional support. German and Austrian findings similarly underline the absence of sustained professional development and the need for systemic investment in staff capacity.

Supporting teachers and staff requires structured training modules on inclusive pedagogy, cultural awareness, and strategies for working with disadvantaged learners. Beyond training, institutions must provide ongoing mentoring, peer exchange opportunities, and access to inclusive teaching guidelines. Embedding Roma mediators and role models within staff teams can further strengthen trust and bridge cultural divides. Ultimately, empowering educators with knowledge, tools, and institutional backing is essential to ensure that VET schools can deliver equitable learning experiences and foster environments where Roma learners feel respected and supported.

## **7. Monitoring and Continuous Improvement**

The sustainable inclusion of Roma learners in vocational education and training (VET) requires ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement. In Greece, stakeholders highlighted the importance of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to track participation, dropout rates, and learner satisfaction, ensuring that interventions remain responsive to evolving needs. In North Macedonia, respondents stressed that continuous improvement depends on active collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including Roma NGOs, mediators, and community representatives, to build trust and co-design policies. German and Austrian findings similarly underline the need for institutional accountability, regular audits of curricula for cultural relevance, and systematic evaluation of outreach strategies.



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Effective monitoring involves establishing clear indicators of success—such as enrolment growth, reduced dropout rates, and improved employment outcomes—and embedding feedback loops that allow learners and families to shape program adjustments. Continuous improvement requires not only technical evaluation but also a commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that Roma voices are consistently heard in decision-making processes. By institutionalizing monitoring mechanisms and fostering collaborative improvement cycles, VET schools can move beyond short-term projects toward long-term systemic change that guarantees equity and sustainability.



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