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Activity 3.1

Supporting / Empowerment Services for Roma learners.

Supporting/Empowerment Services Guidebook



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Supporting/empowerment Services Guidebook

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1. Introduction

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDEBOOK

This guidebook is designed to assist educators, vocational trainers, social workers, Roma mediators and community leaders in delivering culturally sensitive and tailored services to Roma learners. Roma communities throughout Europe encounter significant barriers to education and vocational training, including discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion. By implementing targeted support and empowerment services, this guidebook aims to bridge these gaps and foster an inclusive educational environment that enables Roma learners to thrive.

The guidebook serves as a practical resource outlining various support mechanisms and empowerment strategies available to Roma learners. It emphasizes promoting social inclusion, enhancing academic and vocational success, and fostering self-advocacy. By equipping Roma learners with essential skills, knowledge, and confidence, we strive to dismantle the cycle of marginalization and encourage long-term social and economic integration.

TARGET AUDIENCE

This guidebook is intended for professionals and stakeholders engaged in the education, vocational training, and social inclusion of Roma learners. Key audiences include:

- Educators and trainers in both formal and non-formal educational settings,
- Vocational education providers,
- Social workers and community leaders,
- NGOs and organizations dedicated to Roma inclusion,
- Policymakers focused on enhancing educational equity for marginalized groups.

PROJECT CONTEXT

The development of this guidebook is part of the broader MIRANDA project, co-funded by the European Union. MIRANDA aims to promote social inclusion through vocational education and training (VET) pathways specifically tailored for Roma learners. The project addresses the unique needs of Roma communities by providing customized educational support, fostering empowerment, and creating employment pathways. This guidebook represents one of several tools designed to achieve MIRANDA's objectives in supporting Roma learners throughout their educational journeys while promoting their active participation in society.

Aligning with the goals of the MIRANDA project, this guidebook offers practical approaches for overcoming the barriers faced by Roma learners. It provides educators and stakeholders with strategies for cultivating an inclusive learning environment that respects cultural diversity and fosters success for all students, regardless of their background.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE



Numerous studies underscore the importance of tailored interventions for Roma communities. For instance, peer-to-peer support models have been shown to enhance educational engagement among Roma students by fostering collaboration between peers and mentors. Additionally, initiatives aimed at improving access to early childhood education are crucial for bridging educational gaps between Roma and non-Roma populations.

Research indicates that empowering local communities through participatory approaches can significantly improve project outcomes by ensuring that interventions are aligned with the specific needs of Roma individuals. Furthermore, national strategies focused on Roma inclusion emphasize the need for comprehensive support systems that address various aspects of social life—education, health care, and employment—thereby promoting holistic integration within society.

By synthesizing these insights, this guidebook not only provides actionable strategies but also reinforces the necessity of culturally competent practices in fostering an equitable educational landscape for Roma learners.

2. Understanding the Needs of Roma Learners

INTRODUCTION

Roma learners across Europe encounter a multifaceted array of challenges that significantly impede their access to quality education and vocational training. A primary barrier is the pervasive discrimination and prejudice faced by Roma communities, which often results in social exclusion and limited educational opportunities. According to recent reports, dropout rates among Roma students can reach as high as 70%, compared to 9.7% for their non-Roma peers, highlighting the severity of the educational inequalities they face. Many Roma learners grow up in conditions of poverty, characterized by inadequate housing, healthcare, and access to educational resources, all of which adversely affect their academic success.

The socio-economic factors contributing to these high dropout rates are compounded by low expectations from educational institutions and a lack of targeted support systems. Language barriers also play a significant role; many Roma learners may not be fluent in the dominant language of their country, hindering their ability to engage fully in the learning process.

CULTURAL FACTORS

Cultural considerations are equally crucial. Roma communities often uphold strong traditions and values that may differ from those of mainstream educational environments. In some cases, families may prioritize or, in some cases force early marriage or labour over continued education, particularly affecting Roma girls who face both gender-based and racial discrimination. Furthermore, the absence of role models in education and employment can limit aspirations and motivation among Roma youth to pursue higher education or vocational training.

To effectively address these needs, Roma learners require holistic support that tackles both academic and social challenges. This includes:

- Tutoring and academic assistance,
- Mentorship programs that connect them with role models,



- Language support to facilitate better communication in educational settings,
- Initiatives aimed at fostering cultural understanding and combating discrimination.

Tailoring educational approaches to respect Roma cultural values while promoting empowerment and inclusion is essential for creating an environment conducive to success. Programs that integrate community participation and intercultural dialogue have shown promise in improving educational outcomes for Roma.

In conclusion, addressing the complex needs of Roma learners necessitates a comprehensive approach that combines targeted educational interventions with broader socio-economic support mechanisms. By fostering an inclusive atmosphere that respects cultural diversity, we can help dismantle the barriers that hinder the educational success of Roma communities across Europe.

3. Supporting Services Overview

To ensure that Roma learners can access and succeed in education and vocational training, a comprehensive set of supporting services is essential. These services provide both academic and non-academic assistance, addressing the barriers that Roma learners face while promoting their success in diverse learning environments.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Roma learners often require additional academic assistance due to gaps in their formal education, language barriers, or lack of access to early childhood education. Supporting services in this area may include:

- Tutoring and Homework Help: One-on-one or group sessions designed to improve understanding of core subjects and develop study skills.
- Mentorship Programs: Connecting Roma learners with role models or mentors who can offer guidance, encouragement, and academic advice.
- Specialized Curriculum Support: Adapting teaching materials to meet the specific needs of Roma students, such as offering culturally relevant content or additional resources to build foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

LANGUAGE SUPPORT

Many Roma learners come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, often resulting in two distinct groups: migrant Roma learners, who may have limited proficiency in the dominant language of instruction, and native Roma learners, who might speak dialects or variations of Romani alongside the dominant language. This linguistic diversity underscores the complexity of addressing language acquisition as a critical area of need.



To effectively support Roma learners, services could include:

- **Targeted Language Classes:** Additional lessons in the dominant language of teaching tailored to the specific needs of migrant and native Roma learners to improve their literacy, academic language, and communication skills.
- **Bilingual and Multilingual Education:** Integrating Romani languages and dialects alongside the dominant language in classrooms to promote cultural inclusion, linguistic equity amongst the students, and a sense of identity.
- **Language Support Programs:** Employing trained language assistants, interpreters, and culturally competent staff to help Roma learners and their families navigate school systems, communicate effectively with educators, and access essential educational resources.

CASE STUDY: THE 'SECOND CHANCE' PROGRAM IN HUNGARY

One successful multilingual education initiative is Hungary's Second Chance program, which was created to support Roma students by integrating bilingual instruction and culturally responsive teaching methods. The program integrates Romani and Hungarian languages into the curriculum, allowing students to develop literacy skills in both languages while fostering a stronger connection to their cultural heritage. A pivotal element of the initiative is the employment of Romani-speaking teachers who serve as both linguistic and cultural mediators, bridging the gap between Roma students and normative education. Additionally, the program provides additional language courses, helping Roma learners strengthen their proficiency in Hungarian while maintaining their native language.

As a result, students enrolled in the **Second Chance** program have demonstrated higher retention rates, improved literacy levels, and increased confidence in academic contexts. The program highlights the effectiveness of multilingual education in supporting Roma learners and emphasizes the importance of integrating Romani languages into mainstream education to promote learning outcomes. Communicating the linguistic needs of Roma learners requires a holistic approach that respects their unique sociolinguistic contexts while encouraging academic and social inclusion. Initiatives like Second Chance demonstrates that promoting multilingual education can lead to greater educational success for Roma students while preserving their linguistic and cultural identity.

Addressing the linguistic needs of Roma learners requires a subtle approach that respects their unique sociolinguistic contexts while encouraging academic and social inclusion.

CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Career guidance is crucial for Roma learners, many of whom may lack exposure to various educational and vocational opportunities. Services in this area include:

- Career Counselling: Offering personalized career advice to help learners explore different pathways and identify further education or vocational training options.
- Workshops on Career Planning: Organizing practical sessions that teach learners how to set career goals, write resumes, and prepare for job interviews.
- Internship and Apprenticeship Opportunities: Facilitating connections between Roma learners and vocational training centres or employers to gain real-world experience and develop professional networks.



DIGITAL LITERACY AND TECHNOLOGY ACCESS

In today's digital age, digital literacy is essential for both academic and career success. Roma learners often face a digital divide due to limited access to technology. Supporting services should aim to bridge this gap by offering:

- Digital Literacy Classes: Training learners in essential digital skills such as using computers, navigating the internet, and utilizing online educational platforms.
- Access to Technology: Providing laptops, tablets, or internet resources, particularly in areas where Roma learners have limited access at home.
- Digital Learning Tools: Implementing online learning tools that cater specifically to Roma students' needs, such as interactive apps for language learning or supplemental educational content.

PSYCHOSOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Many Roma learners experience discrimination, social exclusion, or personal trauma, which can significantly impact their academic performance and overall well-being. To address these issues, schools and vocational centres can offer:

- Counselling Services: Access to school counsellors or psychologists who can help learners cope with personal challenges, stress, or emotional difficulties.
- Peer Support Networks: Creating groups or clubs where Roma learners can connect with peers facing similar challenges, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support.
- Anti-Bullying Programs: Implementing initiatives that raise awareness about bullying and discrimination specific to Roma students while promoting a safe and inclusive school environment.

These supporting services play a vital role in ensuring that Roma learners have the tools and assistance needed to thrive in education and beyond. By addressing their unique needs through personalized academic, emotional, and career-related support, these services can help close the opportunity gap and promote equal access to lifelong learning and employment opportunities.

4. Empowerment Services Overview

Empowerment services are designed to equip Roma learners with the skills, confidence, and agency necessary for active participation in their education, community, and future careers. These services extend beyond academic support to foster self-esteem, resilience, and social inclusion—critical components for overcoming the systemic barriers that Roma learners frequently encounter.

LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Empowering Roma learners with essential life skills enables them to navigate personal and professional challenges, fostering independence and resilience. Key services include:



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- **Soft Skills Training:** Workshops or courses focused on building communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, all essential for success in education and the workplace.
 - **Time Management and Organization:** Teaching learners effective time management techniques, goal-setting strategies, and organizational skills to balance academic responsibilities with personal life.
 - **Financial Literacy:** Programs educating learners on budgeting, saving, and understanding personal finances, which are particularly important for Roma families facing economic challenges.

ADVOCACY AND SELF-REPRESENTATION TRAINING

Roma learners often confront institutional and social challenges that necessitate self-advocacy. Empowerment services should focus on:

- **Self-Advocacy Workshops:** Training learners to articulate their needs in educational settings, understand their rights, and participate actively in decisions affecting their education.
- **Leadership Programs:** Encouraging learners to assume leadership roles in school or community activities, thereby building confidence and a sense of responsibility.
- **Awareness of Legal Rights:** Educating learners about their legal rights within educational and employment contexts to empower them against discrimination or unequal treatment.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Fostering a sense of belonging is crucial for Roma learners who often experience social exclusion. Services in this area aim to integrate them into broader social and educational communities:

- **Cultural Awareness Programs:** Creating spaces for Roma learners to share their culture, traditions, and history with peers, promoting mutual understanding between Roma and non-Roma students.
- **Community Involvement Opportunities:** Organizing volunteer activities or civic engagement programs that allow Roma learners to contribute to their communities, fostering pride and belonging.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Encouraging participation in sports, arts, or youth clubs to help build social networks and develop new skills outside the classroom.

PARENTAL AND FAMILY EMPOWERMENT

Empowering the families of Roma learners is vital for creating a supportive home environment that values education. Services should include:

- **Parental Workshops:** Workshops emphasizing the importance of education for Roma parents while providing strategies for supporting their children's learning.
- **Family Counselling:** Counselling or mediation services addressing family concerns that may impact a learner's educational journey.



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- Community-Led Initiatives: Involving Roma community leaders in educational initiatives to build trust and encourage family support for learners.

ROLE MODELS AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

Many Roma learners lack positive role models who have succeeded in education or vocational training. Empowerment services should be prioritised:

- Mentorship Schemes: Pairing Roma learners with mentors from similar backgrounds who can provide guidance and serve as positive role models.
- Success Stories and Peer Support: Highlighting stories of successful Roma individuals who have overcome barriers while fostering peer support networks where learners can share experiences.

GENDER-SENSITIVE EMPOWERMENT SERVICES

Roma girls often face additional challenges due to gender roles within their communities. Tailored services should include:

- Gender Equality Workshops: Promoting gender equality through workshops that challenge traditional roles while emphasizing the importance of education for both genders.
- Female Mentorship: Connecting Roma girls with successful female role models who can inspire them to pursue education and careers in underrepresented fields.
- Support for Young Mothers: Providing specialized support for young Roma mothers through childcare services and flexible learning options that enable them to continue their education.

By offering a diverse range of empowerment services, the MIRANDA project aims to cultivate a sense of agency and confidence among Roma learners. These initiatives not only facilitate academic success but also encourage active engagement within their communities. Ultimately, these services create pathways for Roma learners to overcome personal and societal barriers, promoting long-term social inclusion and economic independence.

5. Collaboration with Key Stakeholders

Collaboration with key stakeholders is essential for the success of empowerment and support services for Roma learners. Effective partnerships among educational institutions, vocational training centres, social workers, mentors, and local Roma organizations are necessary to provide a holistic approach that meets the diverse needs of Roma students.

SCHOOLS AND TRAINING CENTRES



Local schools and vocational training centres play a pivotal role in delivering foundational educational support to Roma learners. Collaboration between these institutions and the MIRANDA project is vital for:

- Tailoring Education Programs: Schools and vocational centres can adapt curricula and teaching methods to meet the specific needs of Roma learners. This includes offering flexible learning options, remedial classes, and culturally sensitive materials to enhance engagement and understanding.
- Early Identification of Learners' Needs: Teachers and vocational trainers are often the first to identify learning difficulties, language barriers, or social challenges faced by Roma learners. Close collaboration allows for early interventions such as tutoring, language support, or career guidance to be implemented effectively.
- Inclusive Educational Policies: Schools can adopt inclusive policies that create a positive learning environment for Roma students. This may involve anti-discrimination programs, awareness campaigns, and initiatives aimed at reducing dropout rates.
- NGO Involvement: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in education and social inclusion can provide valuable resources, including training for teachers on cultural awareness, extracurricular programs, and advocacy for policy changes. NGOs also serve as mediators between schools and Roma families to foster mutual trust and engagement.

SOCIAL WORKERS, MEDIATORS AND MENTORS

Social workers and mentors are crucial in ensuring that Roma learners receive comprehensive support that extends beyond the classroom. These professionals play an essential role in:

- Providing Holistic Support: Social workers address broader social and economic issues affecting Roma learners, such as housing insecurity, healthcare access, and family dynamics. By collaborating with schools, they ensure that learners receive the necessary social services to succeed academically.
- Building Trust with Families: Social workers help foster trust between Roma families and educational institutions, bridging cultural divides and addressing concerns that may hinder full participation in school.
- Mentorship Programs: Mentors, especially those with Roma backgrounds or familiarity with the community's challenges, provide invaluable guidance and serve as role models. They inspire learners to set goals, navigate challenges, and pursue academic or career opportunities while offering emotional support.
- Advocacy and Representation: Social workers and mentors advocate for Roma learners within schools and other institutions, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

LOCAL ROMA ORGANIZATIONS

Collaboration with Roma-led student and alumni organizations is essential for developing culturally sensitive programs and fostering trust within the community. It is also essential as it helps to strengthen Roma identity and appreciation of Roma communities. These organizations possess deep



knowledge of local Roma populations and can provide crucial insights into how best to support learners. Key aspects of collaboration include:

- **Cultural Sensitivity and Trust-Building:** Involvement of Roma organizations ensures that support services are culturally relevant. Their participation fosters trust between Roma families and the education system, which is often viewed with scepticism due to historical discrimination.
- **Community-Led Initiatives:** These organizations are well-positioned to lead initiatives involving Roma communities in developing educational programs. This may include organizing workshops or cultural awareness events that emphasize the value of education.
- **Peer and Family Support Networks:** Local organizations can facilitate peer support networks and family engagement programs that help learners feel connected while navigating the educational system. This could involve parent groups where families share experiences on supporting their children's education.
- **Advocacy for Policy Change:** Roma-led organizations play a vital role in advocating for policy changes at local, regional, and national levels that promote educational equity for Roma learners. Their collaboration with schools, training centres, and social workers helps drive systemic changes addressing the root causes of educational disadvantage.

By working closely with these stakeholders, the MIRANDA project can create a robust network of support addressing the full spectrum of needs faced by Roma learners. This collaboration ensures that students receive not only academic assistance but also social and emotional resources necessary for their success in education and beyond.

6. Strategies for Implementation

Implementing successful support and empowerment services for Roma learners requires a strategic and adaptive approach. The following strategies focus on ensuring that services are tailored to meet individual learners' needs, monitored for effectiveness, and informed by best practices from similar contexts.

TAILORED APPROACHES

Each Roma learner faces unique challenges influenced by their educational background, language proficiency, family circumstances, and cultural context. It is essential to adapt services to meet the specific needs of each learner. Suggested strategies include:

- **Personalized Learning Plans:** Develop individualized learning plans that reflect each learner's strengths, areas for improvement, and future goals. These plans should be updated regularly to track progress and adapt to evolving needs.
- **Culturally Relevant Content:** Integrate culturally relevant materials and teaching methods into the curriculum. Including Roma history, literature, or cultural practices can foster a sense of identity and belonging in the classroom.



- Flexible Learning Models: Offer flexible learning pathways, such as alternative schedules or vocational training programs, to accommodate learners facing family or economic pressures.
- Holistic Support Services: Address broader socio-economic factors impacting Roma learners and their families by providing services such as transportation assistance, language support, and access to healthcare or social services.
- Gender-Sensitive Approaches: Pay particular attention to the needs of Roma girls, who may face additional cultural and gender-based challenges in accessing education. Mentorship programs led by female role models or additional support for young mothers can significantly enhance their participation.

MONITORING AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Effective monitoring and evaluation are crucial for ensuring that services meet the needs of Roma learners and achieve desired outcomes. Regular feedback from learners, families, and stakeholders can help continuously improve services. Suggested methods include:

- Regular Progress Assessments: Track academic and personal progress through standardized assessments, teacher evaluations, and self-reports conducted at regular intervals to identify areas needing additional support.
- Feedback from Learners: Collect feedback directly from Roma learners about their experiences with provided services through surveys, focus groups, or one-on-one interviews. Encouraging them to express their views on the relevance and effectiveness of support can provide valuable insights.
- Family and Community Input: Engage Roma families and community members in the evaluation process by seeking their feedback on how services impact their children and the community as a whole. Their input can help identify areas for improvement.
- Data-Driven Adjustments: Use data collected through assessments and feedback to make evidence-based adjustments to services. This could involve scaling up successful interventions or adapting strategies to meet changing needs.
- Mentor and Teacher Reflections: Encourage mentors, social workers, and teachers to provide regular reflections on learners' progress and challenges observed in day-to-day interactions. These professionals often have valuable insights into service effectiveness.

BEST PRACTICES

Drawing on successful examples from similar contexts can provide valuable lessons for implementing effective support and empowerment services for Roma learners. Below are a few best practices observed in similar initiatives:

- Case Study 1: The Roma Education Fund (REF)

The REF has successfully implemented education programs across Europe focusing on closing the education gap between Roma and non-Roma learners. A notable best practice is the use of scholarship programs that provide financial support for secondary and higher education combined with mentorship and academic counselling. This comprehensive approach has significantly increased retention and graduation rates among Roma students.



- Case Study 2: The European Youth Forum's Peer Mentorship Model

This initiative established peer mentorship programs connecting Roma youth with older students or professionals who have successfully navigated the educational system. The peer mentorship model has proven effective in providing role models while fostering community belonging. Peer mentors assist younger learners in building confidence, setting academic goals, and overcoming barriers such as language difficulties or discrimination.

- Case Study 3: Inclusive Education Pilot in Romania

Several schools in Romania piloted an inclusive education model aimed at integrating Roma learners into mainstream classrooms. Best practices included regular teacher training on cultural awareness, involvement of Roma community mediators to improve school-family relations, and extracurricular activities promoting social integration. These efforts helped reduce dropout rates while increasing engagement among Roma learners.

- Case Study 4: Mobile Schooling Programs in Hungary

In regions where Roma children have limited access to formal education, mobile schooling units have been introduced. These programs deliver on-the-go education services directly to marginalized communities. Mobile classrooms bring teaching materials, trained educators, and technology directly to learners, promoting continuity in education while improving literacy levels.

By incorporating these strategies for tailored approaches, establishing robust monitoring mechanisms, and learning from best practices, the MIRANDA project can effectively implement empowering support services that significantly enhance educational outcomes for Roma learners.

7. Conclusion

The ultimate goal of the **Supporting and Empowerment Services Guidebook** is to promote the empowerment of Roma learners through education and social inclusion. By providing tailored support services, promoting partnerships with major stakeholders, and implementing proven strategies, we can create an environment where Roma learners have the tools and opportunities they need to succeed. Education is not just a pathway to personal and professional growth; it is also a powerful means of overcoming the systemic barriers that have historically marginalized Roma communities across Europe.

This guidebook serves as a vital resource for teachers, social workers, mediators, and community organizations, enabling them to collaborate effectively in cultivating a supportive, culturally sensitive, and inclusive environment for Roma students. Through active collaboration among these parties, we can ensure that educational programs are not only accessible but also relevant to the unique cultural contexts of Roma communities. Continuous monitoring and ongoing feedback mechanisms will allow us to assess the effectiveness of the services provided, ensuring that they remain impactful and responsive to the evolving needs of Roma learners. Furthermore, empowering Roma learners through education is not only an investment in their future but also an important step towards building stronger, more cohesive communities for all. Uplifting marginalized communities and individuals within our society, we contribute to a richer tapestry of cultural diversity that benefits everyone. The success of Roma learners reflects positively on our collective commitment to social justice and equality. To achieve these goals, it is undeniable that we must adopt a holistic and



intersectional approach that includes not just academic support, but also emotional and social resources. This includes promoting an environment where Roma students feel safe to express their identities and being encouraged to pursue their aspirations without fear of discrimination or exclusion. To institutionalize the proposed measures for Roma education within education policies and ensure long-term sustainability, several key strategies should be implemented. First, **governments** should integrate multilingual education, targeted language classes, and support programs into **national** education policies and legal frameworks. This act would ensure that these measures are not just temporary initiatives but permanent components of each country's education system.

A **dedicated funding mechanism** is essential to sustain these programs over time. Governments could allocate resources within education budgets, try to find international funding support, and actively encourage public-private partnerships to ensure adequate financial backing for multilingual education programs, teacher training, and language support services. Finally, teacher training and certification programs could incorporate Roma-inclusive pedagogy, cultural competence, and bilingual teaching. By embedding these elements into professional development, inclusive teaching methodologies can become a standard part of all mainstream education systems.

To oversee the successful implementation and sustainability of these measures, education ministries should establish Roma education advisory bodies that include Roma community representatives. These bodies would provide recommendations, monitor progress, and ensure accountability in education reforms. Furthermore, school curricula should be reformed to integrate Romani language and culture, with the development of appropriate textbooks and teaching materials that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of Roma students.

A strong monitoring and evaluation system should be established to assess the effectiveness of multilingual and inclusion strategies. Regular evaluations, impact assessments, and data collection would enable policymakers to improve their approaches and adapt measures based on evidence and research. Legal protections against discrimination must also be reinforced within education policies to ensure that Roma students have equal access to education, supported by anti-discrimination frameworks, teacher sensitivity training, and mechanisms that enforce these measures and protect them. Another critical factor is community and family engagement. Education policies should actively encourage collaboration with Roma parents and families through outreach programs, parent training initiatives, and participation in school governance. Institutionalizing partnerships between schools and Roma advocacy organizations would support trust and engagement, creating an inclusive learning environment.

By embedding these measures within national and regional education frameworks, governments can ensure that inclusive education policies for Roma learners are not only implemented effectively, but also sustained over time. This approach will lead to systemic change, providing Roma students with equitable educational opportunities and fostering their long-term academic and social success.

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