



PLA CROATIA

START THE CHANGE - EMBRACING DIFFERENCES THROUGH INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND VOLUNTEERING

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INTRODUCTION

SIRIUS 2.0. PEER LEARNING

SIRIUS 2.0 – Policy Network on Migrant Education (EAC/S28/2016) aims to promote cooperation between different stakeholders, support inclusive policy development and implementation at different governance levels and facilitate the integration of children and young people with migration background in school education.

One of its activities entails Peer Learning Visits to promote transnational learning between various types of stakeholders, such as policymakers, practitioners, migrant-led education initiatives and organisations, etc. In the process of identifying good practices and receiving multistakeholder international feedback, the Peer Learning Visits consolidate good practice and stimulate further innovation both in the host and in learning countries. The follow-up reports include policy recommendations and descriptions of educational practices that is expected to contribute to the content development of the EC's Toolkit for Schools and School Education Gateway. The results of the follow-up reports will also feed into the development of the annual SIRIUS Watch. Finally, the Peer Learning Visits facilitate exchange and learning between partners and their policymakers and stakeholders. This process further consolidates the national partnerships within SIRIUS and its functioning as a sustainable and inclusive European network.

The Peer Learning Visits are implemented based on the established SIRIUS Peer Review methodology. This methodology was applied in SIRIUS reviews during the EC funded period 2012-2014, and in one of the follow-up Erasmus + projects 'Professional capacity in dealing with diversity' (2014 –2017). Partners' national reform priorities were identified through a partners' survey in January 2017 and then the good practices were selected based on SIRIUS' evidence base of studies since 2012.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PLAs 2019

The Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) are SIRIUS' means to consolidate good practice and promote knowledge transfer within the network. PLAs are organised in such a way as to present the good practice from diverse perspectives of practitioners, policymakers and researchers. The visits ensure that the visiting teams have access to the implementing practitioners and to the beneficiaries of the practice, including on-site visits to schools, interviews with teachers, students, school leaders. The visiting teams (peer reviewers) are also composed of mixed teams made up of practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

PLAs' objective is, on the one hand, to inform host countries on how they might improve their practices further and provided recommendations to visiting countries on how to transfer the practice to their educational systems. The study visits thus ensure the increased knowledge within SIRIUS on what works and why and, as such, strengthen the network.

In this year 2019, we have organised two Peer Learning Visits, in May and June, in two countries, respectively in **Ireland** and **Croatia**.



PLA in Croatia

Host partner: Forum for Freedom in Education (FFE)

Practice: Start the Change - embracing differences through intercultural education and volunteering – project. The initiative aims to prevent violent radicalisation and promote democratic values, fundamental rights, intercultural understanding and active citizenship. The project focuses on developing and nurturing the values and capacities of young people and their educators for: psychological thriving, emotional development and self-regulation, civic competences, connectedness, positive attitudes towards differences as well as multi-perspective and deeper understanding of the world. Teacher training is an integral part of the project.

Visiting partners: University of Western Macedonia – UoWM (Greece); High Commissioner for Migration – ACM, University of Porto – CIIE (Portugal) + SIRIUS EU network members (DBI, EPA, NEPC, OBESSU) + 2 experts

PLA in Ireland

Host partner: New Communities Partnership (NCP)

Practice: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. The measure is a social inclusion strategy developed by the Department of Education and Skills. The initiative focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and youths from disadvantaged backgrounds in order to improve learning outcomes and prevent early school leaving. DEIS quantifies the level of disadvantage in schools, and eligible schools are placed in two bands depending of the relative level of disadvantage among its students. A range of supports is made available to recipient schools, including grants, planning supports for effective resource allocation and access to a School Meals Programme. Many of the students in DEIS-schools come from migrant backgrounds, and DEIS offers many suitable supports in terms of social integration and language.

Visiting partners: PRAXIS Center for Policy Studies (Estonia); Fryshuset (Sweden) + SIRIUS EU network members (DBI, EPA, NEPC, OBESSU) + 2 experts

1. THE PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY IN CROATIA

Included in a series of transnational exchanges – the PLA activities – the Peer Learning Activity to be accounted in this report took place May 2019 in Croatia as part of the SIRIUS 2.0 project activity. The visiting countries, Portugal and Greece, were responsible for information and data collection in order to clarify how different organisations and systems in the visited context are structuring their action plan and activities to provide quality integration, inclusion and fair opportunities for migrant populations (namely children and young people) including refugees. The main purpose of the PLA is to exchange knowledge and experience, and provide feedback to visited organisations, which stimulates interpersonal engagement. The PLA activities are an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to become acquainted with strategies and good practices but also difficulties and obstacles present in a specific context and its institutions. In addition to the possibility of sharing knowledge among SIRIUS project members, the experience also provided an overview of the current migrant situation in different contexts



and of the types of challenge professionals educating newly arrived children and young people encounter. This particular series of PLA has the advantage that various standpoints were represented among participants – from practitioners to researchers and policy makers – providing different contributions and insights about the same topic.

The increasing number of migrants in European countries invites the discussion concerning how to better integrate these “new” communities in society, especially in educational contexts. The school context may be one of the first places where diversity, learning and the development of tolerance, respect and values intersect (Palaiologou & Zembylas, 2018; Farmhouse, 2011). Considering the school’s importance as the most visible educational institution and its crucial function in societies’ development (UNESCO, 2006), we admit that many young people can experience feelings of unfamiliarity (Silva, 2013) with the values transmitted by a school that is targeted to the dominant culture. Many studies (Cortese, 2000; Cortese & Stoer, 2003; Dietz, 2003; Ferreira, 2003; Leite, 2005; Burns & OECD, 2010; Palaiologou & Evangelou, 2012, Huber & Reynolds, 2014) have tried to focus on the relation between teaching practices and the integration of students with minority backgrounds, but few (Palaiologou et al, 2019, Silva & Silva, 2016) have discussed the need to develop intercultural competences also among professionals of other educational contexts, as non-formal ones. However, young people’s experience of non-formal contexts seems to be more pacific and pleasurable. It is important to recognize that the inclusion and empowerment of young people does not just depend on school education but also on an education that is shared (Ribeiro, 2014: 314). The experiences outside of school are meaningful for young people, as well as the contact with adults outside of the school institution that might be role models in their lives (Silva & Silva, 2016). In this sense, the institutions visited in this PLA gave us an important insight into how different education contexts can contribute to an inclusive educational society.

The methodology

The Peer Learning Visit took place on the 9th and 10th of May and was organised by the *Forum for Freedom Education (FFE)*. We visited the institutions *Are you Syrious* and VET Bernardin Frankopan Ogulin school.

These organisations represent different but convergent approaches for dealing with the integration of migrants and refugees, in particular at young ages. The following table provides some information about how the PLA was developed.

Day 1: 11th of May
Visit to Forum For Freedom Organization and “Are You Syrious” organization.
Croatian Educational System overview by Eli Pijaca Plavišić, Forum for Freedom in Education Migration and refugee issues in Croatia by Julija Kranjec, Center for Peace Studies START the CHANGE project overview by Visnja Pavovlić, Forum for Freedom in Education
“Are You Syriouse” organization <i>Are you Syrious overview</i> by Anamaria Macanović, Are you Syrious (AYS)?
Interviews with coordinator Interviews with volunteer Interview with beneficiary
Post-visit meeting – feedback session



Day 2: 12th of May
Grammar school Bernardin Frankopan, Ogulin
<i>All for One, One for All project</i> by Branko Rumenović, teacher
Interviews with teachers – two teachers
Interviews with principal
Interview with students – 2 from economic program and 2 from salesperson program
Post-visit meeting – feedback session

SIRIUS' delegates were usually divided into two groups, responsible for having conversations with different actors and taking fieldnotes.

2. CONTEXT OF THE PLA VISIT: SETTING THE STAGE

About the Start the Change project

Name of the project: **START THE CHANGE** – EMBRACING DIFFERENCES THROUGH INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND VOLUNTEERING

Countries involved: Croatia, Slovenia, United Kingdom and Italy

Project lead: Forum for Freedom in Education – Croatia

Duration of the project: December 2016 – December 2018

Overall objective: Preventing violent radicalization and promoting democratic values, fundamental rights, intercultural understanding and active citizenship.

Purpose of project: Since radicalization most often happens in a context of deprivation (weather economic or psychological), within search for meaning and identity, but is also fueled by personal issues and/or need for revenge, Forum for Freedom in Education led, between 2016 and 2018, an Erasmus+ project START THE CHANGE – EMBRACING DIFFERENCES THROUGH INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND VOLUNTEERING.

This project focused on developing and nurturing the opposite values and capacities: psychological thriving, emotional development and self-regulation, civic competences, connectedness, positive attitudes towards differences as well as multi-perspective and deeper understanding of the world. Special contents and activities were therefore developed, aimed at creating cooperation opportunities between various groups (disadvantaged, majority, minority, community), and enriching this contact with innovative ideas for volunteering, mutual aid, understanding, and creativity.

Collaboration among partners from Croatia, Slovenia, Italy and the United Kingdom led to project results such as an established cooperation between 40 schools and local CSOs in implementing the intercultural and peacebuilding projects reaching out to over 2000 young people. It was a large-scale coordinated action that motivated children and young people to be active, critical and brave in stating their opinion and fighting for what they believe in. It motivated their teachers and mentors to start up projects on their own aimed at developing sensitivity towards the “different” and “others” and engaging young people in socially aware and peace-building projects.



The key project's good practices included identifying young people's needs through the focus groups and accordingly adapting the existing training curriculum and teaching resources (handbook and workshop book in 4 languages). Further, the teachers from participating schools were trained in 5-day long training and supported in implementing schools project in which students strengthened their personal, social and civic competences and took up the roles of agents of change in their schools and local communities. These good practices were up-scaled to the partner organizations by adapting teaching resources and training curriculum to the contexts of partner countries and through training of trainers from partner countries that made possible the exchange of good practices. Each partner organization further shared methodology and tools with teachers of participating schools and supported them in implementing school projects and thus reaching out to young people. All good practices by schools were collected and presented through the final publication and the video documentary.

The PLA was concentrated around this project, which was enrolled for instance in the Grammar School Bernardin Frankopan (in Ogulin, 106 km out of Zagreb). The school faced problems with students' academic success, their acceptance among their peers, and feelings of injustice because of discrimination on the grounds of gender, nationality, appearance and socioeconomic background. There was lack of extracurricular activities emphasizing on the acceptance of diversity. The LA team could see the change the school has made.

Since a second school could not be found for those PLA-days, FFE decided to show the NGO "Are you Syrious", an NGO run mainly by volunteers to help asylum seeking youth in Croatia with housing, schooling, health, everyday tasks and language learning.

We were hosted by the Forum for Freedom in Education (FFE). FFE is a civil society organization active since 1992. Its main goal is to work on the educational system in Croatia through the educational standards of modern democratic societies, providing equal access to education and high quality programs to either teachers or students, so as to improve knowledge and skills and enable them to participate in societal and democratic processes. One of the main points is that programs are developed and based on specific educational and community needs.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE CROATIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

The educational system in Croatia consists of the following stages (in chronological order): kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and higher education. Primary compulsory education in Croatia lasts for 8 years, involving 500 hours of instructional time. Secondary school students attend a three- or four-year program and mostly enroll in Vocational Schools.

Primary education provides education to children aged 6 to 14. There are nearly a thousand public primary schools, directed by municipalities. Primary schooling is divided into two levels:

Grade 1-4, with one teacher per class focusing on subjects such as: Croatian, mathematics, visual art, nature and society, physical education, music, religion (elective course), and at least one foreign language (usually English);



Grade 5-8, where subjects are taught by specialized teachers. New subjects are also introduced: history and geography, chemistry, physics, biology, informatics, and a second language (German, Italian or French).

Secondary schooling is optional in law, but the attendance rate is over 99%. There are different types of secondary education:



Photo: Brainstorming at Forum for Freedom in Education

General secondary education taught at Gimnazija (offers four different tracks, based on your specialty);

Art education taught at umjetnicka skola (art schools);

Secondary vocational education taught at vocational or trade schools

The **higher education system** in Croatia is a binary system (university and professional studies) and is structured in three cycles: undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate.

There is a general shortage of teachers, mostly in rural areas and islands and lack of professional support (e.g.

psychologists): the teacher-to-student ratio has fallen from 1:13 to 1:9.5 in the last five years. Some of the weak points mentioned are that there is lack of implementation and adoption of educational programs in primary education and lack of educational research data.

Migrant population figures

Both delegations were provided with information about the situation in Croatia concerning migrants and refugees.

According to Eurostat, in 2015, 26.700 non-EU citizens lived in Croatia, representing less than 1% of the total population (0.6%). Based on MoE data, we can conclude that the most important reason for immigration is family reunification, followed by work, secondary or tertiary education, and humanitarian reasons. The countries of origin of the majority of 'third country nationals' (TCNs) in Croatia are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Russia, Ukraine and the USA. The majority of all TCNs are nationals of Yugoslavia successor states.

Croatia has 22 recognized minorities According to Eurostat, 35.000 people are foreigners and have mostly come from former Yugoslavia. 705 people have been chronicled as refugees (1/3 have already left Croatia) and in 2017 there were 200 children with migrant backgrounds in Croatian schools.

Inclusive education

The programs developed for refugee children and migrants are very few. Croatia does not have a long tradition of receiving students from different cultural or migrant backgrounds. In the past years, most of the enrolled students were from European countries, which is why those students attend programs taught in English. Students without official status are not allowed to enroll in the educational system and attend school. Only those who are

in Removal Process, in detention centres or in the final phase of getting documents may attend school. European citizens are provided with free language classes in their mother tongue, but only in case a bilateral agreement is provided. Students from Afghanistan or Iran have classes in Croatian, asylum-seeking children and refugees have the same rights and need to be enrolled in school in 30 days. During this period, children attend 70 hours of preparatory classes to learn the language, and if needed 70 additional hours of language classes are provided.

A structural problem seems to be the lack of support for students and staff. Teachers are not prepared to work with children whose mother tongue is not Croatian and the material available is scarce. Teachers are creating their own, which is not standardized and, in some cases, lacks efficiency. Teachers' main desire is to start working on the development of tests before students' enrolment.

5. UNDERSTANDING CONTEXTS, PRACTICES AND GOALS

5.1. Study Field Visit School and Organization "Are you Syrious"

Are You Syrious Project Building

This particular organization works as an integration center with people working mostly voluntarily. It is "a frontline organization that supports refugees and asylum seekers with the aim of integrating them by liaising with national services in Croatia" (Fieldnote). The NGO is managed and run by volunteers and some of the volunteers are also refugees. Their main goal is to provide daily support to refugees and asylum seekers. They have developed independent integration programs for both children and adults, to facilitate their access to education, housing and employment (Are You Serious-Facebook page).



Photo: *Are you Syrious* Head Office

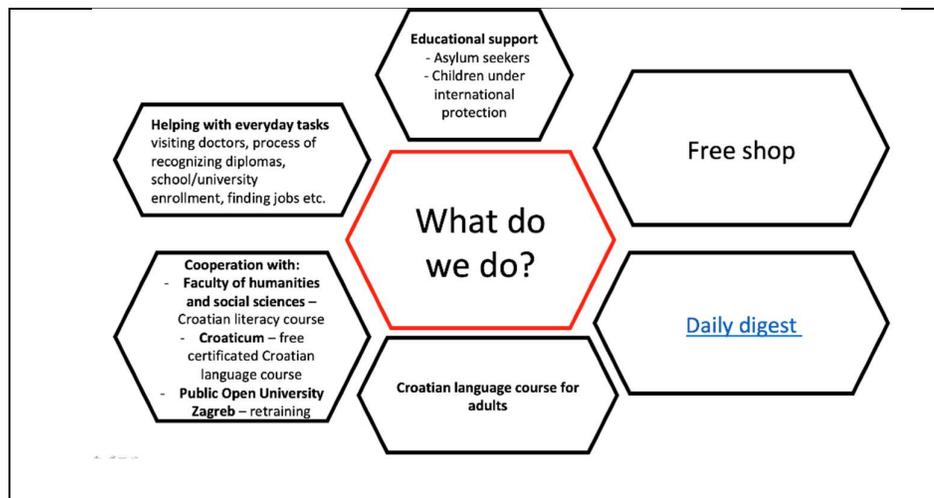
There are 767 persons under international protection, among which 284 are minors. Less than 200 are asylum seekers (about 30 are minors). When arriving, refugees go to asylum seeker centers in which they are provided with free meals and accommodation and, in some cases, with an apartment rental until they go to reception centers. They have the right to have 2 years of free accommodation, and afterwards they should have found a job and a house. In detention centers, people may stay for up to three months. Government sees no difference between detention and reception

centers. "Are you Syrious" offers the following support through the volunteers' cooperation:

- Special educational support is provided in the reception centers.
- Daily digest (info-team of volunteers directs news from camps).
- Start translating important leaflets into Croatian language.
- Croatian language classes for people under international protection, because the State's provision is not enough and people need to get the certificate to apply for citizenship.

- Production of educational material
- Individualized lessons for asylum seekers and refugees to learn the language.
- Help for asylum seekers and refugees in their contact with social services.
- Integration programs and campaigns to make everyone feel welcomed.
- Access to entertainment, such as local activities, theatre, cinemas.
- Facilitating of connections among parents, students and teachers.
- “Big brother”, “Big sister” program: to help students to enrol in school, help students with homework, facilitate connections between parents and teachers or students and university.
- Educational Support with bilingual materials.

From the information provided, we selected the following picture of the NGO work:



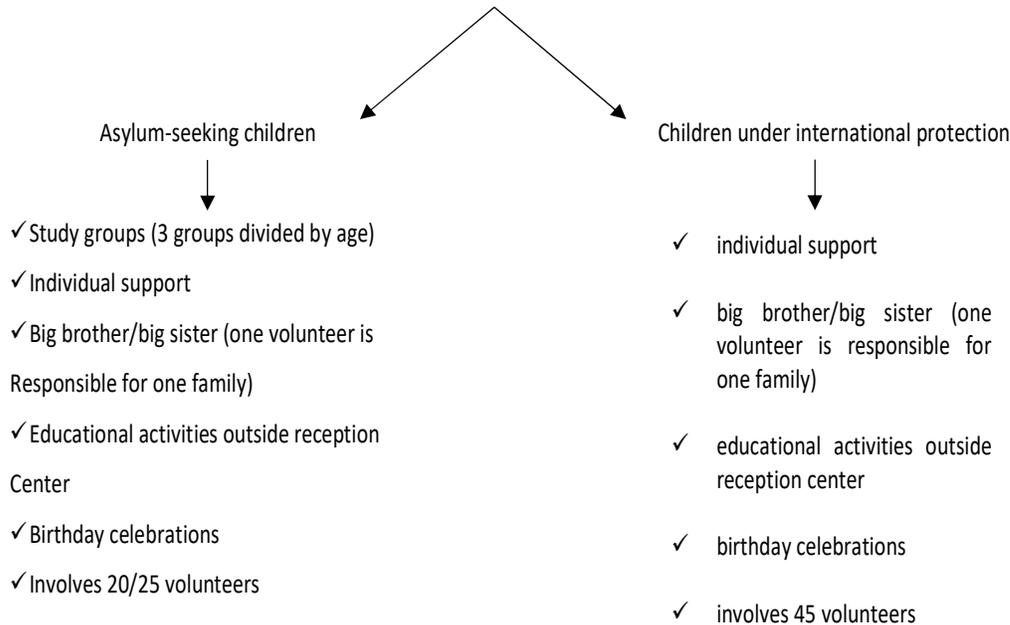
(PPT provided by AYS project coordinators)

Students are divided into three different age groups and volunteers help them with Croatian language learning. In ordinary Croatian schools, refugees have access to 70 hours of language classes and after the 70hours classes they complete exams to obtain the same rights as the other students. It is worth to say that the 70 and, in some cases, 140 hours provided to learn Croatian language are not enough, which is why extra support is needed). Additionally, there is a shortage of material and governmental help (in fact, the State ended financial support).

The educational support works as follows:



Educational Support Provided



Exchange mini interviews: learning from the field voices

A. Perspectives from the coordinator

The coordinator had previous experience in the NGO coordinating 70 volunteers who support people in education. The team includes three professionals and several volunteers working as mediators and translators. A needed legal advisor is not included in the team, but a lawyer comes and helps them voluntarily. The organisation sends migrants to the legal service in Zagreb. The coordinator mentioned the following issues regarding the organisation:

The **organization faces strong difficulties in finding volunteers**. There are teachers, lawyers and advisors on a voluntary basis. Difficulties in finding volunteers results from the fact that there are new needs and new people on a daily basis. Moreover, it is hard to convince people to volunteer for a long period of time. It is necessary for people to offer their voluntary services for at least 4 times a week in order to be sensitive enough to understand the needs of and to develop a connection with the persons in need.

This type of organisations seem to work in a **very difficult equilibrium**, dealing with obstacles related to the legal procedure (like problems with institutions) while trying to help to find the best solutions (find *friendly* people with availability to cooperate with them). They develop a good practice of monitoring and follow-up on cases, such as recognition of diplomas, etc.

Social media work as a communication platform. Facebook page “Asylum Croatia” is the place to post information about donations, courses (starting dates) redirecting people to appropriate services.



When asked how they know and evaluate how they achieved their results, the coordinators responded that they are recognized when people come and say things to them on Facebook. They upload everything on a group page and they talk about ways to solve the problems.

Once a month volunteers gather in a meeting sharing experiences and obstacles, providing support to each other. They have similar troubles with the system, even when they have international protection.

While volunteers exchange ideas and information about good practices with other institutions they don't get concrete information about what to do. The most important request that they have for the Ministry of Education concerns a differentiated and tailored education to address the needs of the students.

Another problem this organisation faces relates to HE students. Croatian students do not have to pay fees to the university, but foreigners do need to pay. Concerning the "asylum seekers", it is up to the board of the University to provide education to each student separately, according to his/her needs and his/her case. Unaccompanied children go to other countries and stay in camps without parents. They may also go to correctional institution to "correct" behavioural problems. There are two more NGO active, the Dentists Dental Support and the GRS (refugee service).

A final comment was made about the national construction of a narrative. From the coordination perspective there is negative public opinion about the presence of refugees. In fact, media is shaping the common opinion and politicians support toxic narratives.

B. Experiences from volunteers

The conversation with NGO volunteers, crucial actors in the development of many activities, provided us with information about the support they give. This allowed us to reflect about the nature of their work, challenges and their own personal development. Usually, each volunteer is responsible to work with one family that visits twice a week. Their work is mainly done in families' homes, developing educational activities (usually related to language development) and helping the family in any aspect they need help with (such as school mediation). Although volunteers affirmed that they only get good experiences from this work, they pointed out the difficulties in establishing limits with regard to the emotional relationship with the family (feeling attached to them).

Volunteers mentioned that they try to respect migrants' cultures but were unclear about what this means and how they do it. The volunteers also help the children and the families with language support and with homework, as well as engage in other leisure activities, indicatively twice a week between 3 or 4 hours. One of the volunteers, a former teacher, specified that: "AYS as an organisation is in contact with all the schools attended by the children. Their schoolmates accept the three children I am in contact with very well and they got support from their teachers. I help them with all subjects when they cannot understand what it is in the textbooks. They know English and German as well, so we can switch to those languages when needed. They work hard and they are doing very well at school. My experience is quite short and I can only talk about the good side of it. AYS gave me a big support when I started volunteering".

C. Perspectives from beneficiaries

The two beneficiaries that were invited to be part of the PLA are examples of two different pathways.



One case (17 years old) represents an experience of deportation from an EU country by someone born in a Middle Eastern country. He experienced the process of adaptation and integration as difficult in the beginning, but adapted after a while. He is satisfied with the project and with the support he is given for school subjects such as mathematics and physics. Both he and his parents are learning Croatian, the aspect that he values the most. In his own words: "At the beginning it was a bit hard, but then situation improved. I am learning the language, I am attending the IT high school and I try to do my best. My courses are in Croatian and I still attend the language support course for foreigners". He feels welcomed in the AYS: "I feel I am not unwelcomed here; I have many friends and AYS volunteers help me with mathematics, chemistry and physics. The most important help I get from AYS is the studying support. I plan to study and learn and I would like to stay here in Croatia, working in the IT sector".

The second experience is by a 21-year-old originally from Africa, finishing HE studies in Croatia. The project is mediating the process of enrolling in university and has been the only organisation where someone accepted to help him. Therefore, the participant feels welcomed in spite of some obstacles: "I feel welcome here, but sometimes there are some issues: I am the only black person in the places I visit, wherever I go people can see that I am black, but I'm trying to see the fact that I am different in a positive light". The quality of the experience and support provided by receiving countries may have an impact on refugees' and migrants' future planning: "I study Croatian by myself, with some material provided by AYS. I am planning to stay in Croatia; I do not want to go to other places. I changed my mind (he initially planned to go to London, red.). I also have psychological support organised by Red Cross."

5.2. Study Field Visit Grammar school Bernardin Frankopan, Ogulin

The school participates in a project called Regional Support for Inclusive Education. According to the website of the Council of Europe (EU)¹ the "school has a wide spectrum of diversity issues, from children belonging to national and ethnic minorities to students with various special educational needs. There are students with different physical disabilities, teenage mothers, children from broken homes, socially-economically deprived families, but also some very talented children. School has students that are refugees, migrant families and returnees".

Grammar School Bernardin Frankopan

Grammar school Bernardin Frankopan is one of the 7 Croatian schools that are part of the Inclusive School Network, together with schools from Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav republics of Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro.

From the informal conversation with school teachers and students, the main problems identified by the students were the differences in social status of the students and the differences between the two schools (grammar students – city, better economic and social background; vocational – rural area, lower incomes). The vocational track has five programs: general grammar project, language grammar, hotel specialist, economist, commerce

¹ <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/web/inclusive-education/gymnasium-bernardin-frankopan-ogulin.html>



Photo: Grammar School Bernardin Frankopan

specialists (335 students, 19 classes) the vocational program is stigmatised as promoting discrimination and this is the reason why this school is also part of the *Start the Change*-project already mentioned earlier in this report.

Therefore, the school wanted to promote vocational education and minimize the differences between students enrolled in different educational tracks. In order to achieve these, the school organised activities to encourage creativity and unanimity: “according to the teachers, the main problems identified by the students were the difference in social status of the students and the differences between the 2 schools (grammar students – city, better economic and social background; vocational – rural area, lower incomes)” (fieldnote).

Start the Project Presentation

The project was an opportunity to minimize the differences between students and between school programs by helping students become aware, for example through focus group discussions, that all school programs have values and even some similarities. The involvement of families was an important part of the project in order to sustain continuity between the school and parents as they play a relevant role in reproducing and reinforcing

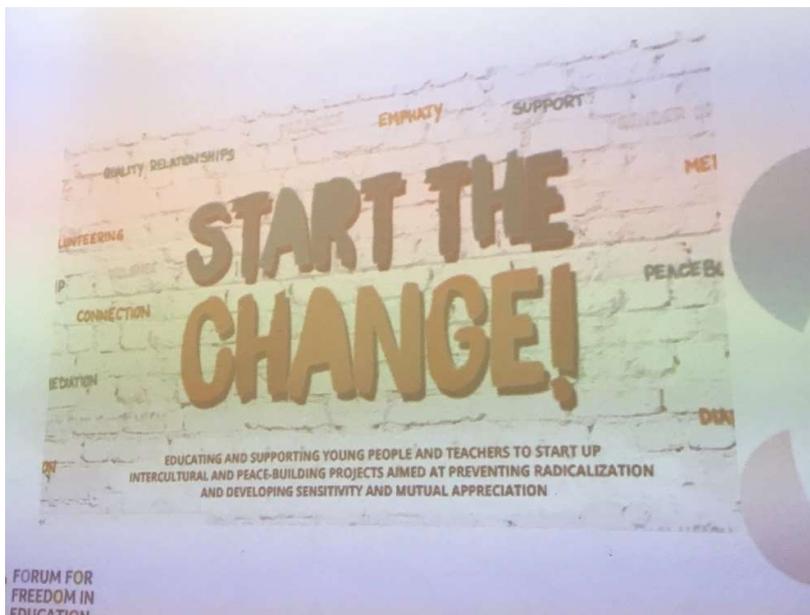


Photo: *Start The Change* Project Presentation

stereotypes about different educational tracks. Workshops on accepting differences, workshops about necessary skills for a good economist or hotel specialist, volunteering initiatives with the local communities and a final conference presenting results to other students and stakeholders in the local community were also part of the project.

Key success factors in *Start the Change* are communication, skills development and to develop a pedagogical concept of inclusion. The participation in this project “is on a good way towards the improvement



of the school climate” (fieldnote). The project seems to have good results and will be replicated in the following years, although is already seen an impact in the school climate.

What really needs to be mentioned is the ethnic composition of Ogulin School and the students’ need to be accepted. At the beginning of Start the Change Project students were not able socialize as they were separated according to the activities because they undervalued some of them, but they accepted them very quickly. The whole program was evaluated through a questionnaire completed at the end of the school year. In conclusion, the cross-curriculum activities encouraged students to communicate with each other, to talk about their problems in class, to connect them and find solutions for them. For these reasons, they are now part of the regular curriculum.

An advantage of the project is that an exploratory action research was developed by teachers involved in the project, which is an indicator of an interest in monitoring the process.

Exchange mini interviews: learning from the field voices

A. Students’ perspectives – 4 VET students – 2 in the last year of economics and 2 in the second year of sales)

The project started by asking students to indicate their difficulties and with the teachers subsequently deciding with what problems they could deal. The students participated by suggesting possible solutions for the difficulties they mentioned. Some of the problems were related to the dress code and the differences between students with different socioeconomic statuses. There is lack of appreciation among the gymnasium students (in both the 4-year vocational program and the 3-year vocational program). At the beginning, they thought that most differences were related to ethnicity. What surprised them was that most of the differences had been found within the programs themselves. The students felt little respect towards each other, which was a big problem (e.g., they did not want to get on the same bus when they went on excursions).

The project involved different activities (e.g., decorating the Christmas tree). While they were hanging out together, students did not think about their differences all of the time.

With the *Start the Change* project, students discovered that they are not so different when they learn and share common activities, for example, while preparing the Christmas tree or visiting the bank. They felt no division during the programs, and they said: “We learned that all school programs have core skills that are equally important”, said the students in the presentation. Students’ mentioned how they had “learnt to appreciate all people”. There was more collaboration and cooperation between them in the project activities, compared to regular classes.

Students were asked to make suggestions for improving the project. They suggested: have students all together in some classes during the whole school year, make a “time machine” where they can put things already prepared, so future generations can see what had been done in the past and get inspired.



The partners wanted to know what lessons students will remember in the future. They mentioned: what the teachers transmitted to them, not only school knowledge but other values, life lessons, and how to be better people and respect others.

B. Exchange mini interview: teachers' perspectives (coordinators of the project)

The teachers we interviewed were very enthusiastic about the project. They were selected to be part of a 5 days' training aiming to prepare them for supporting their peers and their school principal in the development of the *Start the Change*-project.

The interviewed teachers mentioned the importance of an engaged leadership: "If the school principal is on board, then something can really change in the school" (fieldnote). The principal and the other teachers had been supportive and were motivated to disseminate the project activities and results among stakeholders and the local community.

A positive outcome of the project was the fact that activities are now integrated in the curriculum. According to a SIRIUS delegate, "they incorporated the project topics in the curriculum for a period of one year and they tried to respect the idea of the students. Other teachers were sceptic at the beginning, but they managed to overcome this obstacle along the way" (fieldnote).

Additionally, teachers mention other positive results, such as awareness about the pedagogical concept of inclusion and encouragement of interaction among students in mixed groups regardless of the school program in which they were enrolled. A clear indicator of the success of the project was the increasing number of students involved.

A very important reference is to the impact of the participation in this type of projects. The impact may translate into the capacity building of schools and teachers to organize activities, in fostering other project ideas and in working as an inspiration to other teachers to participate.

6. KEY MESSAGES AND LEARNING POINTS

The PLA experience provided information about a situation that cannot be understood from a regional standpoint only but has to be approached at a larger scale (European level). The organisations we visited indicated that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding among the state employees and services on how to cope with the specificities of the asylum seekers in terms of education, social services, courts, training or employment. The support systems in Croatia need to be questioned with regard to their support provision and effectiveness.

NGO Are you Syrious

Although the number of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Croatia is very low, it was not clear if the initiatives by *Are you Syrious* are enough to support these groups and how many migrants are not receiving support. However, despite the severe gaps in legislation and, perhaps, lacks in political investment, the efforts made by the NGO are promising.



In order to develop support for migrants further, we make the following suggestions, which is, however, dependent on strict conditions:

- **Suggestion 1.** The work of the NGO is very valuable. We advise to organise awareness sessions/ trainings for services and/or professionals, so they can learn how to deal with critical situations in the future without depending structurally on the NGO. But this requires an open dialogue between the State and NGOs and this is not common in Croatia.
- **Suggestion 2.** Define a plan/campaign for changing the public opinion/ perception of migrant groups using (different kinds of) mainstream media. For this a large amount of funding is needed.

The PLA provided insight into the following:

- Tensions between law and practice (the way in which policies are structured do not allow to work on what is actually needed).
- There is a great need for long-term strategies.
- Mediation strategies are of great importance (For instance, one participant emphasised “the importance of mediation between schools, students, teachers and parents” and the fact that “we can all be mediators”).
- There are some organized programmes to foster inclusion and integration of young people and children with migrant background in schools. A good example is the programme *Start the Change*, a program financed by EU Erasmus + which aims to report and develop good practices giving the floor mainly to young people and making them problem solvers, developing competences and raising awareness by being directly involved in the activities.

School Bernardin Frankopan

With regard to the school, it became clear that the activities implemented were created by the two teachers alone. The initial needs assessment was a valuable step of the project. Some key points were expressed with regard to the usefulness of participating in a project:

- The social contact gained through these activities that enables participation and sharing experiences with the others, and in doing that enhance social change;
- “Inclusive education is the key to eliminate discrimination”

In order to improve inclusivity within the school, we propose the following:

- **Suggestion 3:** Combine different assessment methods such as anonymous questionnaires, students’ focus groups, debates. Involve different members of the educational community.
- **Suggestion 4:** Involve students, parents and other teachers in working on ideas for fulfilling identified needs and in developing other strategies to assess students’ needs.
- **Suggestion 5.** Include strategies to follow up and measure impact, learning outcomes, and challenges and to reflect on possibilities for improvement of the project in the project development.



7. TRANSNATIONAL ASPECTS

A common remark in many of the testimonies from this and previous PLAs is that there is a need to do more for the migrants and for migrant education. It is clear that participation in the projects encourages schools and other organisations as well as individuals. According to a SIRIUS delegate, “such projects provide a sense of agency and empowerment to young people” (fieldnote).

Although the general discourse is that we may obtain results through education, the educational strategy cannot be separated from political decisions at both national and international level (Palaiologou and Gorski 2017). There is a general understanding about the value of sharing knowledge and exchanging experience.

However, in this PLA, the impact of these short-term strategies and projects – sustained very often by voluntary work due to lack of resources – was less visible. Nevertheless, we could understand the “professionalism and the sense of mission of ASY and the volunteers” (fieldnote).

As in many EU countries there is a need of more investment in high quality teachers’ training (both in pre service and in service), as well as in the development of opportunities for teachers and other professionals to become engaged in peer teaching and peer learning activities.

The students’ involvement throughout the project using research action or participatory methodologies seems to be a key factor in amplifying the impact of the results, using young people as “knowledge producers” (Ollner, 2010). As mentioned: “the beneficiaries (students) said that they would like to repeat the experience and the older ones stated that they would like to have a project like this at University, due to the ‘soft – and life skills’ that they acquired” (fieldnote). For the SIRIUS 2.0 project and members it is relevant to understand new impact indicators of inclusive education programmes that have more (or a different) impact than expected. These impacts may only be measurable if regularly monitored.

A final remark concerns awareness about different tools that may help in delivering a more inclusive education. The team was introduced to the *Multilingual Teaching Materials Forum for Migrant Pupils in Europa – AVIOR* that has developed and tested bilingual material through translation, study visits, case studies, implementation in local schools, working conferences and creating a handbook. With tools such as these, educational policy makers, leaders and teachers may be better prepared to fulfil the needs of students with different migrant or language backgrounds with regard to literacy and numeracy skills. They provide deeper insight, a faster and better knowledge of students’ needs, opportunities for bilingual education, faster answering to these special commands, understanding the special capacities teachers need to obtain to cater to the need of that particular student population



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