



TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS INTO
INCLUSIVEHUBS

Lessons from Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Portugal

- SUMMATIVE REPORT -

Prepared by
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INCLUSIVE HUBS - A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO TRANSFORM SCHOOLS INTO INCLUSIVE HUBS -
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Introduction

Purpose

The increasing presence of students with migrant backgrounds in primary education in the European Union’s (EU) member–states has raised the need to address ways of empowering their social inclusion. This report aims to present the capacity-building activities and implementation programs that took place online and in primary schools in Cyprus, Finland, Greece and Portugal. These activities were intended to improve the capacity of schools and communities to work together and act as inclusive hubs for migrants while combatting barriers to inclusion.

Target-groups

This report is designed for educators, teachers and school administrators who work at schools with migrant and/or refugee students. It is also addressed to anyone interested in understanding the social inclusion of students with migrant backgrounds and wants to learn more about initiatives aiming at that.

The Inclusive Hubs Project

The **Inclusive Hubs - A whole school approach to transform schools into Inclusive Hubs** is an initiative co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union and implemented in 4 EU countries by 6 organisations. Its purpose is to help make school spaces places for inclusion, where all learners will feel welcome, respected, and valued, particularly those with fewer opportunities, like migrants. Through the project implementation, we supported holistic approaches to teaching and learning, as well as collaboration among all actors relevant to schools (school staff, communities, migrant learners, and their families) to transform schools into inclusive hubs. As low proficiency and early school leaving are recognised as the results of struggling in learning and social exclusion, some EU countries have developed national strategies to facilitate stronger communication between schools and local communities and provide measures to foster inclusion. The project aimed to contribute to such efforts by developing materials and tools focused on well-being, inclusion, mental health, and personal development.

Activities

Capacity-Building

Between April and May 2024, project partners delivered some capacity-building activities for adult trainers, school staff and cultural mediators. The purpose of these activities was to equip participants with the necessary skills to act as mediators for migrants’ inclusion, by focusing on their upskilling and knowledge sharing. Participants had the chance to become familiar with the Toolkit and Curriculum on topics related to migrant students’ social inclusion (inclusive education, community engagement, mental well-being, cultural mediation), both developed throughout the Inclusive Hubs project lifecycle.

During this time, 6 capacity-building activities took place in Cyprus, Finland, Greece and Portugal, both in a face-to-face and online format, with 288 participants joining.

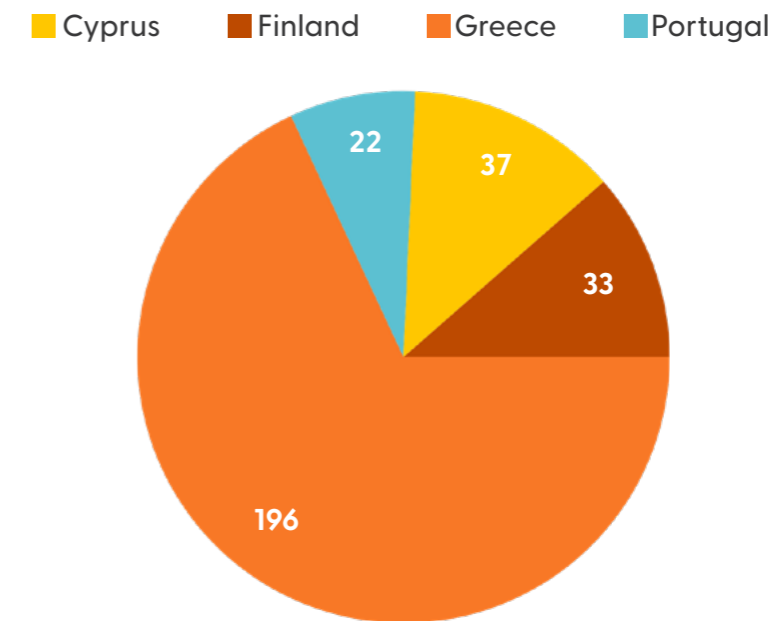


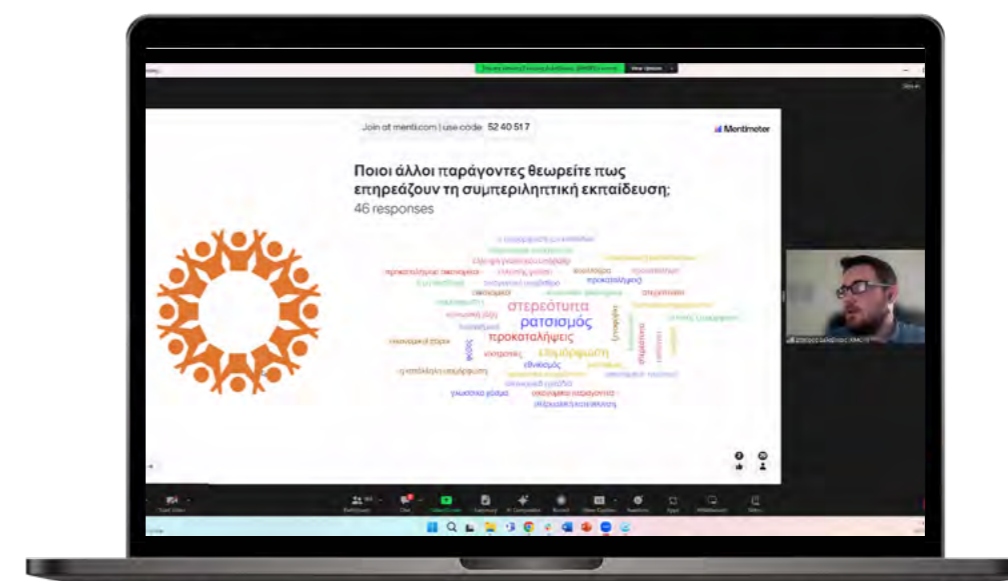
Figure 1. Number of Participants in Capacity-Building Activities per Country

The capacity-building activities were implemented by taking into account each organisation's capabilities and the specific country context. Some activities took place face-to-face, granting the opportunity for a more solid exchange of opinion among participants and training activities better focused on individuals. Other activities took place online, giving the chance to people to familiarise themselves with concepts and tools relevant to the social inclusion of migrant students, especially those from distant places, without many learning opportunities on such topics but with a significant thirst to learn. Some activities, like those implemented in Greece, included guest speakers, who talked about relevant topics, such as inclusive education, good practices, tools and services that schools have access to receive support and the role of the community in the social inclusion process. Other activities focused exclusively on the Inclusive Hubs Toolkit and Curriculum as was the case with the capacity-building activities in Portugal and Cyprus.

These activities included a variety of positive aspects. They embraced a combination of both theoretical and practical components, allowing participants to explore topics relevant to their work with migrant and refugee students. The participants had the chance to exchange personal experiences and best practices. The individual and group exercises, technological tools, infographics, and videos used sparked the discussion between participants and trainers on topics related to the social inclusion of students with migrant backgrounds. Participants gained awareness of collaboration strategies and identified tailored interventions to support migrant students' success and well-being.

Besides the positive aspects, the activities came across the challenge of time. The matter of time in these activities was the most common challenge reported, as it limited the opportunity in some cases to go more in-depth into topics and concepts related to the social inclusion of migrant and refugee students.

Overall, the capacity-building activities gave the opportunity to school staff, members of the community and parents to explore ways of fostering a more inclusive school environment in the participating countries.



Implementation Program

In parallel with the realisation of the capacity-building activities, project partners initiated an implementation program, involving one primary school in each partner country. The purpose of this implementation program was to transform schools into inclusive hubs. One selected school in each country worked closely with the project teams of the partners, the migrant family of learners and the community to co-design activities and promote the project activities. The participating schools were selected based on the criteria, such as the high number of students with migrant backgrounds and their involvement in previous activities of the Inclusive Hubs project.

The implementation program took place in the last months of the school year (April to June 2024). During these months, 4 schools were recruited in Cyprus, Finland, Greece and Portugal and more than 100+ teachers, students, school staff, parents and members of the community were involved in the activities of the implementation program in these 4 countries.

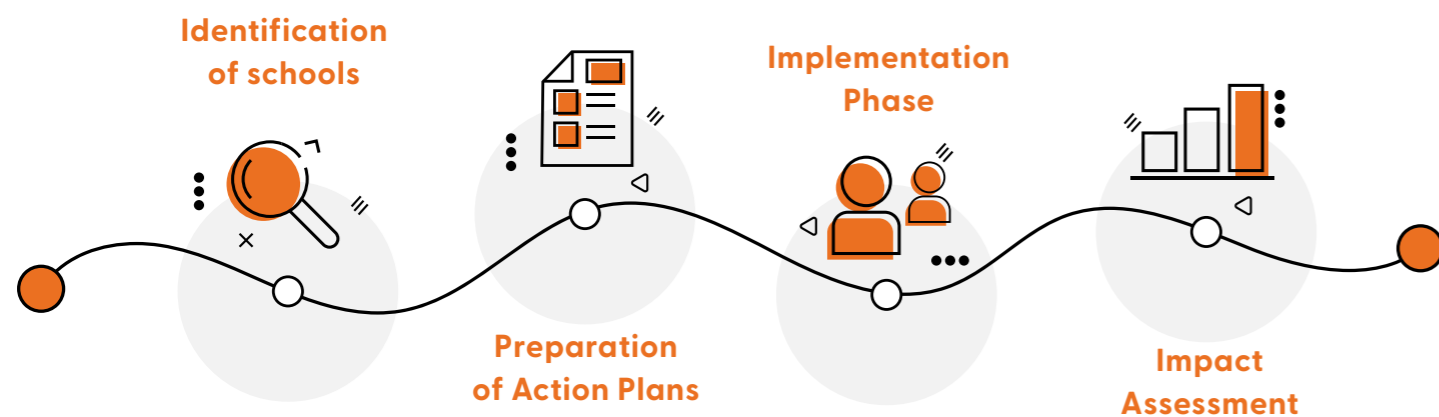
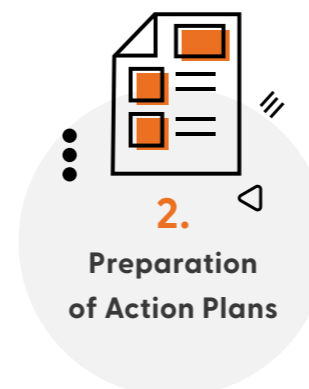


Figure 2. Steps of Implementation Programs

The implementation programs followed the steps outlined below:



In the initial phases of the implementation program, partners recruited schools with a high percentage of migrant learners and/or a high percentage of migrants in the local community. Once the schools were identified, communication with the school's administration and school staff was initiated.




The initial meetings and discussions with the schools' administration and teaching staff were focused on both presenting the Inclusive Hubs objectives and the National Action Plan developed in the project's previous stages, and identifying the school's particular needs and preferences.

Some common needs identified in all participating schools included:

- ▶ Increased interaction between local and migrant students
- ▶ Enhanced relationships between schools, migrant families and the community
- ▶ Provision of cultural mediation and translation services
- ▶ Collaboration with school psychologists and other specialists

One additional need in the case of Portugal was the encouragement of nurturing values in students, such as multiculturalism and respect for differences. In the case of Cyprus, an additional identified need was the creation of a library, featuring picture books and storybooks on acceptance, diversity and inclusion.

Based on the discussions with the school administration and teaching staff, an Inclusion Plan was prepared for each school, according to its needs and capabilities during the final months of the school year. This action plan included scheduled activities and a timeline for their implementation, selected and adjusted by the school administration and staff.



3. Implementation Phase

These activities aimed to offer opportunities for social learning and engagement among schools, migrant families and learners, in activities on topics like interculturality, health and well-being, cultural mediation and interpretation. The implementation phase took into account each country's context and the participating schools' preferences, needs and capabilities.

Given the active involvement of school personnel in the design and implementation of the activities, these were carefully selected to address their specific needs. Therefore, the nature and content of these activities were prepared on an ad hoc basis, varying according to the unique requirements of each school.

Some schools selected to focus their attention on the aspect of school, family and community engagement, as were the cases of schools in Finland and Greece. Other schools chose to focus most of their activities on involving more migrant students in the teaching and learning process, as is the case in Cyprus and Portugal.



In **Cyprus**, the action plan included 14 different activities that were mainly focused on students and school staff. The different activities implemented in each country are depicted in Annex 1. These included games during breaks, fostering engagement and the creation of a playlist of traditional music from students' countries. A mentoring program was also implemented, pairing local students with migrant peers, while Greek language courses took place integrating cultural elements and vocabulary. Activities such as discussions on bullying, storytelling, and the creation of a multicultural recipe book encouraged sharing and reflection. Additionally, in-class surveys and video presentations offer opportunities for students to share their experiences, culminating in a final celebration at the end of the school year, featuring performances in Greek. Furthermore, the Cypriot action plan foresees the conduct of additional activities at the beginning of the next school year.

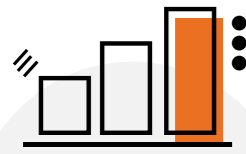
In **Finland**, the action plan included two main components: i) a workshop with teachers, representatives of community organisations, student healthcare team, interpreters and parents, where the participants were asked to work on a SWOT analysis of their school and their community and develop action plans for empowering relations between school, families and the community. ii) An event providing parents of migrant students and local actors in the community a chance to meet at the school facilities. During this event, representatives of local associations organising extracurricular activities for school-aged children were invited to present their activities and services to the parents. Interpreters were present at this event to facilitate the discussion between parents and representatives of local associations.

The action plan for **Greece** included three activities: Two meetings with parents and community members and a discussion with students. The meetings with parents and community members took the form of collaborative sessions where school staff, parents and representatives of local associations came together to discuss and share insights on the challenges faced by the school and the broader neighbourhood. The students' involvement occurred in a conversation among them in the classroom and was facilitated by a teacher. Migrant students had the opportunity to share and talk with their peers about the culture of their country of origin. The objective of this session was to foster a cultural understanding among students, promoting a more inclusive and diverse learning environment.



The **Portuguese** action plan consisted of 12 different activities. The series of activities focused on exploring and celebrating diversity, fostering mutual respect, and understanding different cultures. Some activities included the reading of children's stories, where students learned about uniqueness and diversity. Other sessions, such as storytelling on volunteering and a video discussion about friendship, highlighted the importance of collaboration and community spirit. The students explored various cultures, including those of Iran, Guinea-Bissau, Switzerland and Japan, through presentations of traditional customs, food, and celebrations. Other activities encouraged students to engage with different cultural perspectives, while a film screening prompted discussions on cultural and social issues.





4.

Impact Assessment

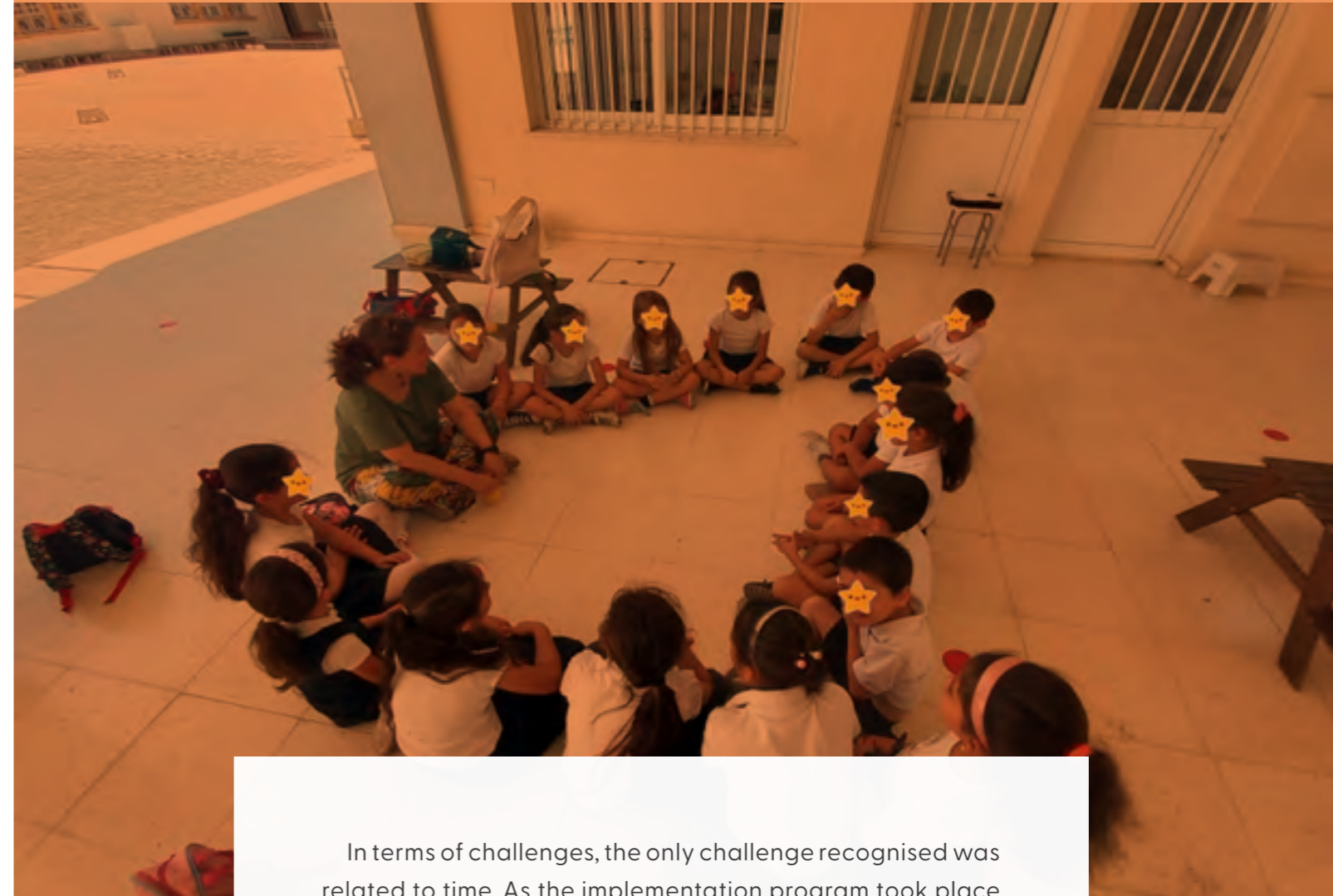
The implementation program was assessed through surveys that project partners shared with the participating school staff to document the experiences and reflections of the people involved, identifying successes, challenges and ways to improve the Program. The impact assessment surveys asked for feedback in three aspects: the development of the action plan, the implementation of the action plan and the impact of the implementation program. The questions focused on the school's involvement in the design phase of the action plan, successes and challenges that occurred during the implementation program, the impact of the program on the school culture, teaching practices and ways of improvement. The surveys were answered by 12 participants in the implementation programs in the four participating countries.

Through this assessment, the participants highlighted several **positive aspects** of the implementation programs. These include: a) their successful realisation in the schools as it was evaluated by the school staff, b) their positive impact on the development of an inclusive culture at their schools, c) their positive impact on the teaching practices of the school staff, d) they help school staff to keep parents involved in school activities, e) school staff have more tools to address certain issues related to migrant students, f) the programs supported the enrichment of the local language vocabulary among migrant students, g) in activities involving students, all students had equal participation regardless of language or origin, and h) opportunity for teachers to exchange materials. Additionally, several school staff expressed their willingness to continue with some activities in the future.

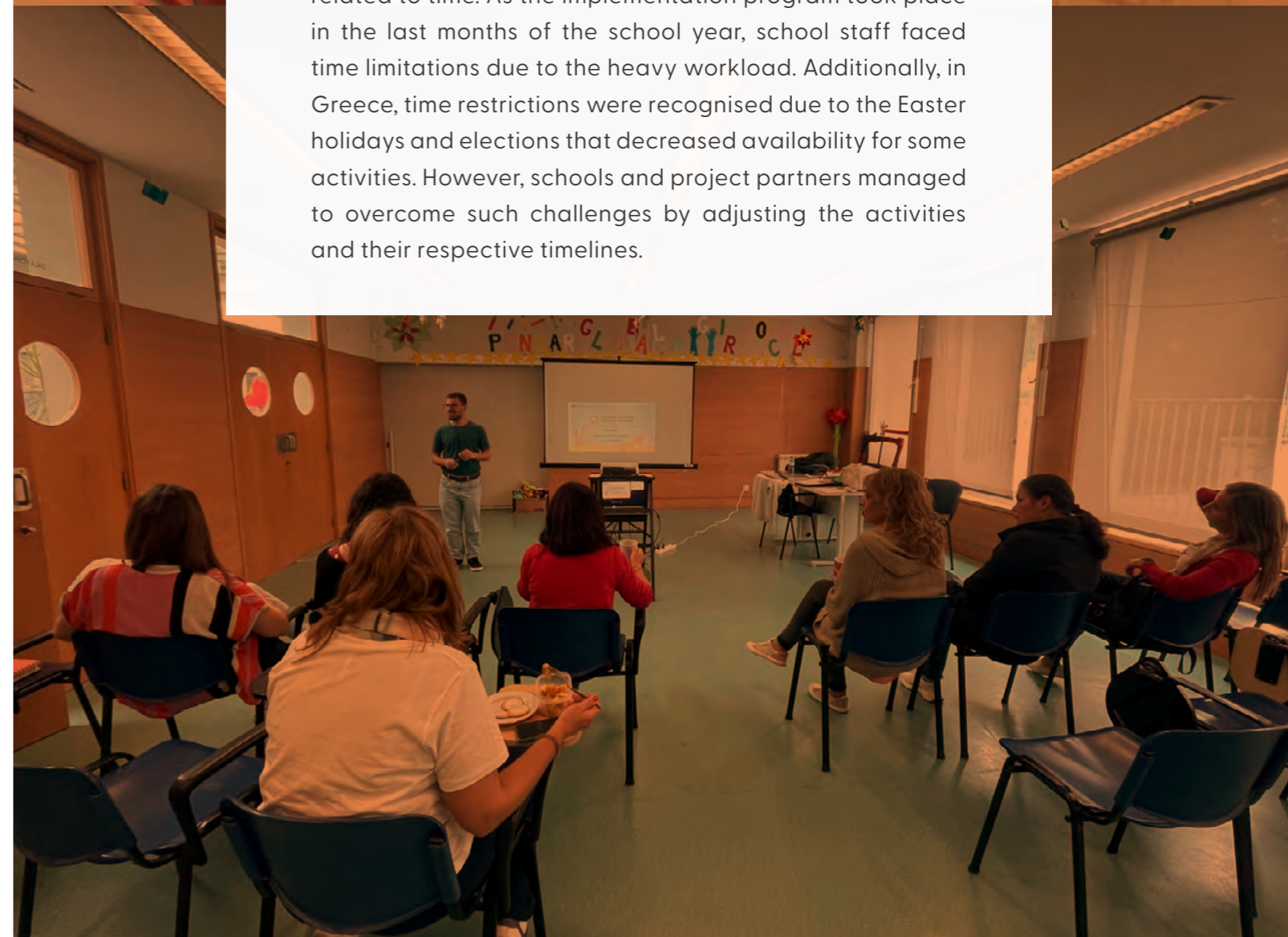
Positive Aspects

Successfull realisation in schools	Enhanced inclusive culture	More inclusive teaching practices
Parents' active involvement	More tools for school staff	Enrichment of local language vocabulary among migrant students
Equal participation	Exchange of materials	

Figure 3. Positive Aspects of Implementation Programs



In terms of challenges, the only challenge recognised was related to time. As the implementation program took place in the last months of the school year, school staff faced time limitations due to the heavy workload. Additionally, in Greece, time restrictions were recognised due to the Easter holidays and elections that decreased availability for some activities. However, schools and project partners managed to overcome such challenges by adjusting the activities and their respective timelines.



Participant's Quotes

“
All children participated equally and no child felt disadvantaged because of language or origin.”

“
Parents participated in some activities and got closer to the school and the teachers.”

“
After this, I know that a student has an engaging and inspiring hobby, which helps her make new friends and be included in the local community.”

“
A step in the right direction, but there is still a long way to go.”

“
The activity effectively enhanced my understanding of inclusive education and intercultural competences.”

Lessons Learned

Throughout our efforts to foster inclusive school environments that address the needs of migrant populations in Cyprus, Finland, Greece and Portugal, we received valuable lessons. By analysing and sharing the lessons learned from these initiatives, we can identify effective strategies for fostering social inclusion and promoting educational equity.



Figure 4. Lessons Learned

One important lesson learned through this process is the significance of a **collaborative approach**. The cruciality of this approach lies in the local knowledge, proactivity and stakeholder engagement in a project's success. The focus is on the active involvement of stakeholders, particularly those who are directly affected, in the decision-making process. This collaborative approach requires local stakeholders (i.e. school staff) to become actively engaged in shaping the plans as this enhances their ownership over them. In our project, schools were actively involved in the design of the action plans at the initial stages of the implementation programs. Their participation in the decision-making process ensured a more active role in the implementation phase. This way, the impact of the scheduled activities was maximised at the schools.

In conjunction with the collaborative approach, **tailored interventions** to the specific needs of each school also emerged as a critical lesson. The implementation programs in each country were adapted to local contexts to ensure that the activities met the unique needs of each school and community. For instance, the Cypriot school focused on building cultural awareness through the creation of a multicultural recipe book, while the Finnish school centred its efforts on workshops to empower the relationship between school, family and community. This type of adaptability proved effective in addressing the different levels of inclusiveness and community engagement in each country.

Through our implementation programs, **community engagement** was highlighted as a significant factor in the process of migrant students' social inclusion. Successful inclusion initiatives require strong partnerships between schools, families and local communities. In all four countries, collaboration was essential for creating a sense of shared responsibility. Workshops, meetings and cultural exchange programs facilitated dialogue and understanding among participants.

One last lesson that we can take away from the implementation programs is related to **adaptability**. Time constraints posed challenges in most activities, as noted across the countries. Whether due to holiday and election periods, such as in Greece, or the late timing in the school year, time management became a critical issue. However, the initiatives demonstrated the importance of flexibility and adaptability, as schools and project partners were able to adjust timelines and activities to ensure that the core objectives of the program were met.



Conclusions

The successful implementation of the Inclusive Hubs project in Cyprus, Finland, Greece and Portugal highlights a good example of an initiative aiming to foster a more inclusive school environment. Through capacity-building activities, educators, trainers and cultural mediators enhanced their knowledge and skills in topics related to social inclusion like inclusive education, community engagement, mental well-being, and intercultural mediation. Additionally, schools implemented tailored activities that promoted social inclusion and strengthened school-family-community partnerships, while laying a foundation for ongoing collaboration and inclusive practices with the potential of a long-term positive impact. Overall, the project demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted capacity-building and collaborative approaches in creating inclusive school environments.

Annexes

Action Plan #1 – Cyprus

Completed Activities (April – June 2024)				
No	Activity	Participants	Impact Assessments	Deadline
1	Games during breaks to foster local and migrant/refugee students' interaction <i>(Photos in Appendix 7.1.)</i>	Supervising teachers and participating students	Oral comments from students & teachers Impact survey for teachers	End of June 2024
2	A playlist containing traditional music from students' countries of origin (Syria, Lebanon, Romania, Russia) for the breaks	Participating teachers & their classrooms	Oral comments from students & teachers Impact Survey for teachers	End of June 2024
3	Mentoring programme, where local students became mentors for 2 migrant/refugee students, who entered the school in April 2024.	Participating teachers, mentors, mentees	Oral comments from mentors & mentees Impact survey for teachers	April - June 2024 Continuation in September 2024
4	Game with country flags and common vocabulary in Greek language course – Level 1	Migrant/ refugee students, who attend Greek language course – Level 1	Students' participation and interest	End of May 2024
5	Discussions and role-playing on bullying, violence and racism (with an emphasis on inclusion strategies) in the "Life Skills" lesson.	Participating teachers and students	Oral comments from students & teachers Impact Survey for teachers	End of June 2024
6	Sharing of vocabulary and cultural elements from students' countries of origin, which are related to the topic in discussion (in the Greek language course)	Teachers and students	Oral comments from students & teachers Impact survey for teachers	End of June 2024
7	Discussion of the story "A big hug", which is about diversity, acceptance and inclusiveness. Activities in class: reading the story, sequencing pictures, analysing information, discussing emotions, expressing opinions and solving problems. <i>(Photos in Appendix 7.1.)</i>	Migrant/ refugee students who attend the Greek language course –Level 1	Students' participation in the activities Impact survey for teachers	7th of June 2024

Action Plan #1 – Cyprus

Completed Activities (April – June 2024)				
No	Activity	Participants	Impact Assessments	Deadline
8	<p>Reading and discussion of fairy tales from the students' countries of origin.</p> <p>Activities: storytelling, discussion of the structure (who, where, when, what, why), sequencing pictures of each fairy tale, comparison of the fairy tales in terms of the content and pictures.</p>	<p>First-year local and migrant students</p> <p>Migrant students who attend the Greek language course – Level 2</p>	<p>Students' interest, participation and work in the notebook.</p> <p>Impact survey for teachers</p>	7th of June 2024
9	<p>Creation of a recipe book entitled "The recipes of our class". In collaboration with their parents, students wrote down their favourite recipes from their countries of origin. All recipes were collected to create a book</p> <p><i>(Photos in Appendix 7.1.)</i></p>	<p>First-year migrant and local students</p>	<p>Students' interest and response to the activity.</p> <p>Final assessment: Each student's recipe</p> <p>Impact survey for teachers</p>	24th of May 2024
10	<p>Recipe collection from the students' countries of origin and presentation in class (during the Greek language course –Level 2, in the framework of the unit "What do we eat?").</p>	<p>Migrant students, who attend the Greek language course – Level 2</p>	<p>Students' interest and response to the activity.</p> <p>Final assessment: Presentation of the recipe</p> <p>Impact survey for teachers</p>	End of May 2024
11	<p>Conduction of an in-class survey and creation of a graph with students' data (country of origin and mother tongue)</p>	<p>Migrant students, who attend the Greek language course - Level 1.</p>	<p>Students' interest and response to the activity.</p> <p>Impact survey for teachers</p>	End of June 2024
12	<p>Watching the video "What would Christmas be without love", which is about acceptance and inclusion. Discussion and activities</p> <p><i>(Photos in Appendix 7.1.)</i></p>	<p>Migrant/refugee students, who attend the Greek language course – Level 2</p>	<p>Students' participation in discussions and activities</p> <p>Impact survey for teachers</p>	End of May 2024
13	<p>Video preparation with students talking about their experience and feelings of this school year – Presentation at the final school celebration</p> <p><i>(Video can be shared, if needed for internal reporting purposes).</i></p>	<p>Third-year migrant and local students</p>	<p>Students' participation and comments on the video</p> <p>Impact survey for teachers</p>	End of June 2024
14	<p>Final school celebration with migrant and local students singing and reciting in Greek.</p>	<p>Third-year migrant and local students</p>	<p>Students' participation</p> <p>Parents' and guests' comments</p> <p>Impact survey for teachers</p>	End of June 2024

Action Plan #1 – Cyprus

Proposed upcoming activities (September – November 2024)

No	Activity	Participants	Impact Assessments	Deadline
1	Cultural event with food and music from other cultures to welcome students & parents	Students, parents, teachers	Interest, participation, oral comments	September 2024
2	Screening of the movie “Wonder”, which is about diversity, as a welcoming event for students & parents for the new school year	Students, parents, teachers	Interest, participation, oral comments	September 2024
3	Activity to get to know each other – students present something from their culture in class (costumes, food, songs).	Students & teachers	Interest, participation, oral comments	September 2024
4	Gratitude box: For a week, each student writes on a piece of paper what they are grateful for and puts it in the gratitude box in the classroom or <i>at the entrance of the school. Sharing in class or during breaks</i>	Students & teachers	Interest, participation, oral comments	November 2024
5	Mentoring program: a local student becomes a mentor of a migrant/refugee student	Teachers, mentors & mentees	Oral comments from mentors & mentees	End of June 2024

Action Plan #2 – Greece

Completed Activities (April – June 2024)

No	Activity	Description	Participants	Time Period
1	Meeting with parents and community members I	A collaborative session where school staff, parents and community members came together to discuss and share insights on the challenges faced by the school and the broader neighbourhood. Emphasis was given to the importance of inclusive education and active community engagement.	Migrant parents, Adult migrants, community members	May 2024
2	Meeting with parents and community members II	A collaborative session where school staff, parents and community members came together to discuss and share insights on the challenges faced by the school and the broader neighbourhood. Emphasis was given to the importance of inclusive education and active community engagement.	Migrant parents, Adult migrants, community members	May 2024
3	Discussion with students	A conversation among students and facilitated by a teacher. Students had the opportunity to share and talk about the culture of their country of origin with their peers. The objective of this session was to foster a cultural understanding among students, promoting a more inclusive and diverse learning environment.	Migrant learners	June 2024

Action Plan #3 – Portugal

Completed Activities (April – June 2024)

No	Activity	Description	Impact Assessment
1	ELMER Exploration	The children explored the story of the character Elmer, a colourful elephant who is different from other elephants, through reading and subsequent group discussions. The final idea was to understand the beauty of diversity and the importance of being unique.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators
2	ELMER fingerprint	The children created and personalised images of Elmer the elephant and then left their fingerprints. The final idea was to celebrate personal individuality and diversity through art.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators
3	Story about Volunteering	The children listened to stories about volunteering, emphasising mutual help and solidarity. This session was organised with special help from the Pista Mágica association. The final idea was to promote community spirit and the importance of inter-help through difference.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators
4	<i>Video: Bridge and the Hedgehog</i>	A YouTube video was shown, followed by a discussion on the themes of friendship, respect and co-operation. Afterwards, the children themselves built a paper bridge in order to emphasise mutual help and respect through creative practices on how to cross the bridge. The final idea was to emphasise collaboration through difference.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators
5	Introduction to the theme “Multiculturalism”	Exploring initial concepts about multiculturalism and the importance of respecting different cultures. They learnt to identify the different cultures present in the same class. The children were asked to ask their parents/guardians more about their own culture. The aim was to encourage respect and appreciation for cultural diversity.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators
6	Exploring the culture of Iran, Guinea-Bissau and the regionality of Madeira	The children of Iranian (Iran), Guinean (Guinea) and Madeiran (Portugal - Madeira Archipelago) origin presented their cultures, particularly in terms of festive days, typical costumes and foods, as well as music, dance, toys, games and other curiosities. The final idea was to get to know and appreciate the cultural richness of different parts of the world.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators
7	Exploring the culture of Switzerland, Brazil and Spain	The children of Swiss (Switzerland), Brazilian (Brazil) and Spanish (Spain) origin presented their cultures, particularly in terms of festive days, typical costumes and foods, as well as music, dance, toys, games and other curiosities. The final idea was to get to know and appreciate the cultural richness of different parts of the world.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators

Action Plan #3 – Portugal

Completed Activities (April – June 2024)

No	Activity	Description	Impact Assessment
8	Exploring the culture of Japan, Italy, Angola and the gypsy ethnic group	The children of Japanese (Japan), Italian (Italy), Angolan (Angola) and Roma (gypsy community living in Portugal) origin presented their cultures, particularly in terms of festive days, typical costumes and foods, as well as music, dance, toys, games and other curiosities. The final idea was to get to know and appreciate the cultural richness of different parts of the world.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators
9	Travelling to another culture I	Each child chose a culture they wanted to visit and described everything they needed in their suitcase to visit that culture. On the back of the suitcase was a plane ticket for each of the children to invite another to take that trip to another culture, which had been prepared. The final idea was to emphasise the importance of understanding and accepting cultural diversity.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators
10	Travelling to another culture II	Each child chose a culture they wanted to visit and described everything they needed in their suitcase to visit that culture. On the back of the suitcase was a plane ticket for each of the children to invite another to take that trip to another culture, which had been prepared. The final idea was to emphasise the importance of understanding and accepting cultural diversity.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators
11	Film screening of “Elemental” and discussion	The children watched the film “Elemental” and then discussed the themes present in the film. The final idea was to encourage critical analysis and dialogue on issues addressed throughout the film and related to difference, mutual help and dialogue on some cultural and social issues.	Oral comments from students & teachers and cultural mediators Impact survey for teachers and cultural mediators
12	Evaluation of activities	Reflection and feedback on all the activities carried out in order to reflect on the learning and value the multicultural experiences lived and shared.	Group discussion



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