

“Regional Support for Inclusive Education”

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**FIRST MEETING OF THE POLICY
TEAM IN
"the former Yugoslav Republic of
Macedonia"**

- *REPORT* -

Prepared by

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Focal Point

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Introduction

The first meeting of the PolicyNet Team in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (the Beneficiary) was organized by the Focal Point, according to the general instructions given by the Project Officer with regard to PolicyNet meetings in the frame of the Joint EU/ CoE Project “Regional Support for Inclusive Education”.

Date and of the Meeting: Thursday, 20 February 2014, 11.00 -16.30

Place: Skopje, Hotel Kontinental

Participants: 10 members of the Policy Team, and members of CoE Office in Sarajevo - Zorica Lesic and CoE Office and Belgrade - Marijana Todorovic, (Annex 1: List of participants)

Moderator: Ognen Spasovski – Focal Point of PolicyNet Team

Preparation of the Meeting

The meeting was prepared in coordination of the Project Officers from the Office in Sarajevo and Belgrade, and the Focal Point of the Beneficiary Policy Team.

Draft Agenda of the Meeting (Annex 2) and ppt presentation were proposed by Zorica Lesic, Project officer in charge of Policy Component. They were translated by the Focal Point. The letters of invitation and draft Agenda were sent to the members of Policy Team. Logistic al support was organized by CoE Office in Sarajevo using the services form a local agency.

Presentation of the Project and Policy Component

At the beginning of the meeting, the Policy Team members introduced themselves, shortly explaining their positions, background and specific relations to and experience in inclusive education area.

Next, Ms. Marijana Todorovic presented the project “Regional support for inclusive education”. She explained the main project objectives, its five components, School Net and Teacher Net, and also gave basic instruction about the Project website, showing some details.

Ognen Spasovski, the Focal Point for the respected beneficiary, presented the Policy Component of the Project in more details, explaining the objectives of the component and the PolicyNet action framework. Additionally, presented was the summary of the issues and policy gaps prepared by the team of experts during the October Meeting in Belgrade. The roles of Policy Team and Focal Point were elaborated, as well as the structure and expected results of Regional PolicyNet.

Discussion, Questions and Comments of Participants

In the next session, discussion was raised on the issues and challenges of practicing Inclusive education in the educational context in the Beneficiary:

The situation where there are number of children (and people in general) who haven't basic documents for identification. This is obstacle for enrolling those children in the school. Disputants appeal for urgent solving of this problem.

It was discussed that there is collision between education-related laws prepared by different ministries. Understatements in the laws are partial factor for the previous issue, too.

Related to previous issue is the following: there is no educational program and opportunity for education for children who are 10 or older and have not enrolled or haven't finished first grade.

Emphasized was the need pre-school education to be involved in the project, due to its significance for further education of the children and their adaptation to school-related obligations and tasks, as one of the crucial factors for underachievement and dropping-out.

Teachers' training was discussed in dept. Participants consider that pre-service and in-service training in inclusive education is insufficient. Regarding this issue, a dilemma appears: whether Inclusive education to be thought as one subject, or to be spread through all the curricula. One of the participants shared the results of a research showing that almost 90% of the teachers declare that they need additional training for work with children who need additional support in learning. University programs for pre-school teachers training don't fit the desired standards, they differ across universities.

Another issue was the cooperation between teachers and support staff (pedagogues, psychologists, special educators). Participants expressed an opinion that there is great space for improvement with regard to this cooperation.

Few members discussed the issue with the external evaluation of children with special educational needs due to disabilities, seeing it as inappropriate and stressful for those children.

It was also mentioned that similar activities are present in the frames of few other projects which are realized in the country. The members emphasized the need for harmonization of the activities with such similar projects.

Participants meant that for Policy Net it will be fruitful if they could visit pilot schools and to discuss with them the main issues and challenges. They stressed the need to cooperate with the schools in implementation of prospected action plans.

To avoid possibility conclusions from previous project meeting to affect the discussion in this team, conclusions from the first PolicyNet team Serbia meeting and from the Workshop Policy Report produced during the Regional Conference in Tirana in November 2014, were presented after this session of discussion and before forming the sub-groups and defining issues and challenges according to the level of education. Anyway, after the presentation of these conclusions, members further discussed these issues with regard to their applicability for the context in the Beneficiary.

Outputs of the Meeting

In the final session, members of the PolicyNet team were divided in three groups according to the level of education: primary, general secondary and VET. Within the sub-groups, they discussed the main issues and challenges related to the respected level of education.

Finally, every group proposed at least three priority issues and challenges for every level, simultaneously discussing which issues are cross-cutting for the different levels.

Based on member's proposals, results are as follows:

| Level/type of institutions | Issues by level/type of institutions | Cross-cutting issues and challenges |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Primary education</p> | <p>Issue: Low level of pre-school enrollment of children</p> <p>Challenges: Different Ministries are responsible for pre-school education and elementary education, having pre-school under MTSP: How to mount the pre-school education among the priorities?</p> <p>Issue: Enrollment of children without documents for personal identification is not possible</p> <p>Challenges: Bridging legislation gaps and procedures which result with "phantom" children</p> <p>Issue: Low level of awareness about the inclusive education in all school sub-structures</p> <p>Challenges: To include the issue of Inclusiveness in the School Annual Program, and, to implement the "hidden" curriculum promoting values, respect and school climate;</p> | <p>Issue: Teachers' pre-service and in-service education- with focus on inclusive education</p> <p>Challenges: In-appropriate university teacher preparation curricula; Low level of cooperation between universities, as well between universities and MOES/BDE - in developing improved pre-service and in-service training programs; Budget restrictions; Dilemma: Inclusive education to be thought as a subject, or to be spread through all the curricula</p> <p>Issue: The role of support expert staff: the expertise of the psychologists, pedagogues and special educator is not appropriately benefited in the classroom</p> |

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| <p>General secondary education</p> | <p>Issue: Low level of cooperation between school-relevant stakeholders toward improving conditions for effective and inclusive educational practice</p> <p>Challenges: Capacity building of the school management in order to provide a cooperation between the school and the parents, community, NGOs, institutions</p> <p>Issue: Sharing experiences between schools, as a system of mutual support</p> <p>Challenges: To provide mechanisms of cooperation between schools, specially remote ones, building a “experience-and-support platform”</p> <p>Issue: Motivating teachers and school staff for professional development</p> <p>Challenges: Inefficient system of teacher promotion and career development</p> | <p>Challenges: Rethinking on the role and expectances from the support expert staff and reform of their professional role in the school</p> <p>Issue: School leaving and drop-out;</p> <p>Challenges: How to improve prevention (from school leaving and dropping-out) through building teachers’ sensitivity to relevant early indicators</p> <p>Related-issue: Transition of the pupils in higher levels of education: 5th to 6th grade elementary, as well from elementary to secondary</p> <p>Challenges: Overcoming the differences in the models of class teaching and subject teaching (and teachers), and sensitization of subject teachers for specifics of the transitions and typical students needs and reactions</p> |
| <p>Secondary education -VET</p> | <p>Issues: Professional follow-up of the students from VET schools</p> <p>Challenges: How to follow-up the students with aim to get a feed-back and to create a database for further guidance</p> <p>Issues: Professional orientation of the students</p> <p>Challenges: How to develop school-based system for continuous professional guidance of the students</p> <p>Issues: Lack of opportunity for vocational</p> | <p>Issue: Lack of teachers in minority languages</p> <p>Challenges: Stimulating university programs in minority languages, budget allocations</p> |

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| | (pre)qualification Challenges: Developing efficient system with shorter VET courses tailored by the needs of the market and of the potential users | |
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Members of the Policy Team also discussed some other issues and challenges: Lack of personal teaching assistants; violence toward members of vulnerable communities, especially Romani subgroup called Chergari; need for support of parents in recognizing the best interest of their children; the issue with families which migrate and are not in the place of their permanent residence, so children cannot attend a school; the need Life Skills Education program to be fully and substantially implemented; the consequences of juvenile marriages; problems with transportation of children from remote regions in the country (and specially in wintertime); insufficient training of teachers to prepare and develop Individualized Educational Plan for the children with special educational needs.

Cross- beneficiary Teams:

| Level/type of institutions | Names of Members Cross-beneficiary Team |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Primary education | 1. Florina Shehu 2. Gordana Nestorovska 3. Dušan Tomšić |
| General secondary education | 1. Biljana Sajkovska 2. Jane Nikolovski 3. Vera Kondić |
| Secondary education –VET | 1. Elizabeta Jovanovska 2. Žaneta Čonteva 3. Snežana B. Risteska |

Note: Focal Point will participate in activities of all three teams.

Conclusions of the Meeting

Objectives of the Meeting are achieved: Members of the Policy Team understood the role and goals of the Team and the Project.

Members for the Cross-beneficiary Teams are define, as well issues and challenges regarding the various levels o education are discussed and defined.

The working atmosphere at the meeting was very positive and constructive.

Lessons learned:

There is a space for improvement of the cooperation between the team members.

They come from various fields which brings quality and multi-aspect view on the topic.

It seems that issues and challenges are well elaborated, but what is further needed for their solving is massive support from the policy makers in the country.

The Focal Point needs to have deeper cooperation and insight in this scope of work of other Policy Net team members, as well to have deeper insight in the work of other components and pilot schools.

Policy Net team has a capacity to be promoter of the idea and philosophy of Inclusive education in the Beneficiary and to contribute to the very same goal in the region.