

*“Regional Support for Inclusive Education”*

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# THE FIRST MEETING OF THE POLICY TEAM (TIOP) CROATIA

## ***-REPORT-***

***Zagreb, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2014***  
***Hotel Dubrovnik***  
***Ulica Ljudevita Gaja 1***

Prepared by

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Focal Point

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## Introduction

The first meeting of Policy Team of Croatia was organized according to instructions of Project Officer in charge of Policy Net Component of the Joint EU/CoE Project “Regional Support for Inclusive Education”.

**Moderator:** Ljiljana Igrić, Member and Focal Point of Policy Team from Croatia.

**Date** of the meeting: Thursday, 20 February 2014, 10.00 -15.30

**Place:** Zagreb, Hotel Dubrovnik

**Participants:** 10 members of the Policy Team from Croatia and a member of CoE Office in Sarajevo: Elmaja Bavčić, Project assistant (Annex 1: List of participants)

## Preparation of the Meeting

The meeting was prepared by members of staff of CoE Office in Sarajevo and Focal Point of Policy Team of Croatia.

Draft Agenda of the Meeting (Annex 2) and presentations were proposed by Zorica Lesic, Project officer in charge of Policy Component. Translation and small adaptation of the Agenda were made by Focal Point Ljiljana Igrić, while the translation and small adaptation in power-point presentations were made by the CoE Office in Sarajevo, Borislava Maksimović and Ljiljana Igrić. The letters of invitation were sent by Focal Point. Logistic support was organized by CoE Office in Sarajevo.

## Course of the Meeting

Members of the Policy Team introduced themselves, with special attention being paid to vast experiences of several members involving inclusion. Since the Education Act of 1980 that first introduced the possibility of integrating children with special education needs was passed over 30 years ago, these experienced span from 30 to 6 years in duration, in case of the youngest Policy Team member (representative of TeacherNet) and cover various education segments, either in form of direct interaction with children or participation in creating educational policies.

Project “Regional support for inclusive education” was presented by Elmaja Bavčić.

Ljiljana Igrić presented the Policy Component of the Project: objectives of the component, PolicyNet action framework, summary of issues and policy gaps prepared by team of experts during the Meeting in Belgrade, the roles of Policy Team and Focal Point as well as the structure and expected results of Regional PolicyNet.

A discussion on issues and challenges of inclusive education in Croatia was open in order to prepare the Policy Team for the PolicyNet meeting in Sarajevo. The discussion included the following topics:

1. Well designed measures and good practices in Croatia
2. Well designed measures combined with poor practical implementation in Croatia
3. Measure that are lacking in Croatia<sup>1</sup>
  - Teachers are willing to work with children with special education needs as well as to further educate themselves and create an inclusive classroom environment.
  - Cooperation in education of experts and an interdisciplinary approach in the education system are required.
  - Most children in Croatia today are integrated in regular schools (app. 15 000), while a smaller part attends special classes in regular schools to avoid sending them away from their families to special schools.
  - A good example of deinstitutionalisation in the social welfare system, a model financed by the Education and Teacher Training Agency, is COO Vinko Bek, a special education institution for children with vision impairment.
  - Inclusion requires a holistic approach that will include parents, teachers, principals, children and the whole community.
  - II. Gimnazija in Split is a positive example of the process of accepting students with disabilities, from initial scepticism to positive attitudes of teachers after gaining experience. The process also included educating other student how to interact with students with disabilities.
  - National Centre for External Assessment in Education has ensured provisions for students with disabilities by modifying of the state graduation exam materials and introducing educated coordinators.
  - Teaching assistants, who have become an integral part of inclusive practice in Croatia, were a major topic. The exact role of teaching assistants in an inclusive class environment is unclear and there is a lack of adequate training for this position. However, there are examples of good practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the discussion is listed under Outputs: Cross-cutting issues and challenges

- Cooperation with schools has proven to be a problem regarding introduction of Croatian Sign Language interpreters (who undergo special training) into classrooms. Thus, their role in class must be clearly defined.
- Level of competence gained by students in special schools has proven inadequate and an obstacle in their further education.
- The importance of inclusion in preschool education and cooperation between parents and various experts were emphasised, seen as many children don't enter the education system before the age of 7.
- The availability of secondary education to students with special education needs is alarmingly low. The fact that secondary education isn't mandatory affects financing of transport, especially in rural areas. This leads to multiple forms of exclusion (poverty, rural areas, disabilities, etc.)

The second part of the discussion was done in three small groups: primary education, general secondary education, and secondary education – VET.

### Outputs of the Meeting

Based on the discussion, the following suggestions were proposed:

Level/sort of education	Cross-cutting issues and challenges	Issues by level/sort of education
Primary education	<p>1. <b>Issue:</b> Increasing teacher competence gained during their university studies.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Tools available for improvement of university programmes that would ensure gain of needed skills are not being used and there is a traditional view that only educational rehabilitators should possess adequate skills for working with children with special education needs.</p> <p>2.<b>Issue:</b> Teaching assistants are an integral part of inclusive education.</p>	<p><b>Issues:</b></p> <p>1.Education and life-long learning of teachers, non-teaching expert staff and all other school employees, as well as cooperation with parents and the community as a whole</p> <p>2.To ensure access to adequate assistive equipment and aids, as well as an entire, wholesome support system to students with disabilities</p>

	<p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <p>Lack of state-level criteria regarding which students are eligible for a teaching assistant</p> <p>Organisation of teaching assistants' work</p> <p>Lack of a financing system</p> <p>Lack of a standardised education of teaching assistants</p> <p>Lack of expert support for</p>	<p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <p>1. A vast system composed of individuals with various interests, age groups and willingness to participate in life-long learning. Lack of time!</p> <p>2. Financial means, cooperation between sectors, inadequate flow of information</p>
<p>General secondary education</p>	<p>teaching assistants</p> <p>3. <b>Issue:</b> Inclusion in the preschool system and cooperation between experts from various levels of education are essential.</p> <p><b>Challenges:</b> In many regions of Croatia many children don't enter the education system before the age of 7.</p>	<p><b>Issues:</b></p> <p>1. To increase the number of students from at-risk groups – to make gymnasiums a more inclusive environment.</p> <p>2. Ensuring provisions for an increased number of students: raising of awareness of all stakeholders in education – students, parents, teachers; individualisation of methods; realisation of gymnasium programmes by including all stakeholders in education; peer support.</p> <p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <p>1. Availability of information: delivering information to the public via the media, enrolment brochures, and "Open Door" days.</p> <p>2. Workshops for all stakeholders</p>

		<p>about given topics; an adequate flow of information from primary to secondary education.</p>
<p>Secondary education -VET</p>		<p><b>Issues:</b>  1.To harmonise VET programmes with the demands of the labour market and to define a framework for modification of VET programmes that would also include the time as a factor.  To define precisely the outcomes of VET and to harmonise them with the demands of the labour market.  2.Providing support – mobile expert teams.</p> <p><b>Challenges:</b>  1.To achieve quality cooperation between parents, experts and educational rehabilitators in development of a framework for modified programmes for specific occupations. The labour market is not well-equipped to welcome people with disabilities.  2.Lack of financial resources required to support the needed number of experts.  Lack of a framework for modified programmes.</p>

### Cross- beneficiary Teams:

All participants agreed to be members of the following teams:

Level and sort of Education	Names of Members Cross-beneficiary Team
Primary education	1. Marija Japundža Broznić 2. Mišo Basić 3. Sanja Tarczay
General secondary education	1. Ivanka Kovačević 2. Mara Capar 3. Nada Jakir
Secondary education -VET	1. Zvezdana Janičar 2. Marijana Gojčeta 3. Lidija Pongrac Vincelj

Focal Point will participate in activities of all three teams.

All members expressed satisfaction in being a part of this Project and optimism regarding the expected results. They also expressed personal readiness to contribute to project achievements in the best possible way.

### Conclusions

1. Objectives of the Meeting are achieved: Project and its philosophy is understood as well as the role of Policy Team.
2. Cross-beneficiary Teams are chosen and issues and challenges are considered and defined.
3. Policy Team worked very openly and constructive.

### Lessons learned:

1. First Policy Team meeting in Croatia included formation of a group of experts who can help improve inclusive education in Croatia and the Region with their vast array of experiences and skills.
2. Exchange of information and perspectives between Policy Team members is important for future decision making regarding inclusive education policy and for each member's performance in their respective workplace.
3. This Project enabled, via the Policy Team, the formation of a support and inclusion advocacy network at a level unprecedented in Croatia.

