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## Embracing diversity through education Regional Conference, Tirana, 6-7 November 2013

### Policy Workshop Report

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## 1. Introduction

The workshop involved 34 participants. They were divided into mixed groups with representatives from Ministries, NGOs and schools from all beneficiaries of the project.

The workshop started with the vision which was developed in the earlier session. In accordance with the Conference Programme and this vision the objective of the Session was defined as:

- To describe existing policies: What policies exist?
- To explore what are the gaps and struggling points?
- To design action steps that will take education systems in SEE towards the vision for inclusive education



The participants worked in four groups. Each group focused at one education level (i) pre-primary school<sup>1</sup>, (ii) primary school, (iii) secondary, and (iv) secondary/VET. The groups were given three entry points or perspectives to assess the policies and policy gaps: Policies promoting ACCESS, LEARNING AND PROGRESSION. Examples were given for each category (see pp-slides).

The groups had intensive discussions and existing policies and policy gaps were recorded on post-it papers. Peer-review was implemented and each group had an opportunity to comment and complement the work of others. At the end of the workshop each group selected three policy gaps they would address in the action plan. One of the actions plans should be a *no-cost action*. Below is a brief summary of the analysis of each group.

<sup>1</sup> Pre-primary was added to cover the whole education cycle and to facilitate the work of four groups.



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## 2 - Findings from the session on the current reality

### Pre-elementary education

The participants noted that in general, pre-education is not systematised as an obligatory part of the overall educational system. Pre-primary education service provision is limited and it is mainly available in cities and targeted to families with employed parents. Thus the potential of pre-primary education in promoting access and learning of vulnerable children is not fully realised. In addition, there is an insufficient number of well trained and qualified preschool teachers. Pre-primary education is also arranged at local level and therefore not much is known about good practises.

Some beneficiaries have introduced positive actions to include children from vulnerable groups in pre-primary education, but these measures are project-based, insufficient and are not promoted. The link between pre-primary and primary education should be strengthened and school maturity tests developed to support the child in a holistic way. The priority actions in promoting pre-primary education should include

- Promoting pre-primary education as an obligatory part of education and ensuring sufficient resources (financial, human, facilities)
- Ensuring that there is a protocol in place for sharing information between pre-primary education and primary education, particularly for children with special needs and children coming from disadvantaged groups, to ensure that there is continuum of support services.
- Focusing on development of a well-qualified teaching force.
- Developing M&E systems which would track both out-of-school children and attendance of children in pre-schools.
- Promoting cross-sectoral cooperation and targeting support to families in need.

### Primary education

According to the existing legislative frameworks, all children in the region are included within the regular primary education system. Policy measures such as free transport or financial support to socially disadvantaged families exist. Good and successful development projects have been implemented in collaboration with ministries but their results and achievements need to be incorporated in the education system as an evidence-base.

Challenges for promoting equal access to education and learning include lack of transportation, registration of Roma children, limited provision of support to disabled children, as well as physically inaccessible premises – the architecture of the schools. Also teachers' limited capacities to identify and accommodate different kinds of learning needs, as well as provision of individual instruction. In addition, policies need to be developed to support efficient targeting of the resources and to ensure that the resources which are available in schools are efficiently used for promoting learning for all. Collaboration between education levels is necessary in progression from preschool to elementary, as well as between social services and education. There are some examples of such cooperation, but this must be even stronger.

All beneficiaries face problems with high drop-out rates, but specific policies on how to address this are still to be developed. Some measures are in place, such as free books and teacher assistants.



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Steps have been taken towards provision of a flexible learning environment but this still needs to be explored further.

The policy actions proposed by the workshop include:

- Ensuring that the initial teacher training includes strengthening teachers' capacity to identify and support different kinds of learning needs.
- Guiding people from vulnerable groups to become teachers and promote scholarships to be targeted to them for this purpose.
- Develop policies to track absenteeism and to identify students liable to drop-out (also at school level).

## Secondary education

With regards to secondary education, the legal framework is positive but the major obstacle is that secondary education is not obligatory. This adds further to the rate of drop-outs, particularly for students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

There exist some support measures and mechanisms targeted at students in need, such as scholarships, but they do not necessarily address all. There are some mentions of individualised approaches to teaching in the region which would be worth of exploring and disseminating.



Also at secondary education level, competences and skills of professionals are a burning issue. Transition from primary to secondary schools should also be tackled at policy level, including development of mechanisms for sufficient information exchange between schools. The participants asked whether there is any example of good partnerships between different governmental structures. If yes, these examples should be promoted. There is also a need to map out what policies exist to prevent dropout.

The action steps proposed by the participants included:

- Development of resource centres with mobile teams of professionals to work with teachers in the field
- Include a compulsory module on IE in every initial teacher training programme to help teachers to recognise children at risk to drop-out and vulnerable; This is needed not only to give information but to influence and change attitudes
- Improvement of information systems on inclusive support measures

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**Secondary Vocational Education:** A general observation was made that Inclusive Education Policies do not cover VET. Similar challenges to other education levels exist: Architectural barriers, limited capacities of VET teachers to deal with different educational needs, stereotypes, limited resources etc. It was also noted by the group that the professional orientation of students coming from disadvantaged groups should already be addressed at primary level as many of them have limited experience about working life and in the absence of role models it is difficult for them to develop their vision for the future.

Positive actions such as scholarships and transport have been developed but in order to support learning and promotion / employment, there is a need for having more specialists who will support the students. Curricula adaptation should be improved and good examples should be promoted at systematic level and through teacher training. Employment models have been developed such as social entrepreneurship but they are not widely promoted. Cross-sectoral cooperation with employment authorities is also necessary.

The workshop proposed the following:

- Simple, low-cost measures could include for instance introduction of professional orientation and vocational guidance and counselling already at the primary level to help children to be aware of all possibilities. This could be introduced also as an extra-curricular activity.
- School management should be supportive and schools should develop stimulating mechanisms for teachers.
- Measures targeting students should include mentoring of assistants for the transition for finding jobs and helping them in maintaining employment.
- Intersectoral cooperation (schools and Ministries of Labour, etc) should be promoted and laws on social entrepreneurships and their connection with schools should be tackled.

### 3 - Findings from the session discussing the next steps

The workshop concluded that there are common issues across all education levels that should be addressed when IE is promoted. These include:

- Educating teachers at all levels to identify and address different kinds of educational needs. Building their capacities would also influence in creating positive attitude environments.
- Supporting transition from one education level to another needs better attention. This is the case particularly with students with special educational needs or students coming from vulnerable groups, as well as students enrolled in special schools. Simple no-cost measures could include for instance provision of encouragement and professional orientation to students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds already during the primary education phase and ensuring that a protocol for sharing information about the student – their strengths and support needs – is in place. Good policies on supporting transition should be mapped out and shared in the region.
- With regards to VET, cooperation with employment sector and authorities is important. Electronic enrolment systems should be developed as well as systems where every student with special educational needs has to go through professional schemes.





- Lack of data and monitoring systems was mentioned regularly as main obstacle for promoting IE and development of inclusive education policies. This goes in line with the need to better define students from vulnerable groups.
- All countries face problems with high drop-out rates. This should be a particular topic for further policy analysis. Policies to track absenteeism and to identify students at risk should also be developed at school level.
- Schools need to be trained on how to manage the existing resources in the most efficient way. Examples from Finland were given on how the classes can be divided into part-time study groups based on the curricula content of support needs.
- Examples of good partnerships between different ministries and stakeholders should be shared across the region. These would also promote the generation of positive attitudes and breaking the stereotypes.
- Further work is needed to comprehensively analyse the good policies and affirmative actions and their effects and impacts.

**Finally, an interesting and encouraging fact was that this workshop did not discuss specifically certain groups of children (such as children with disabilities, or Roma) but the discussion reflected more systemic level challenges. This is a major step in promoting inclusive education philosophy, as the principle is not to categorise children and services but to develop the education system to meet different kinds of needs.**

#### 4. Recommendations:

Continuing the work on mapping out good policies in the region would be a major step towards development of inclusive education systems. This could be one of the main actions of the Policy Net. As far as is known this kind of comprehensive analysis of policies across the education cycle has not been done so far and it would be a significant input to each beneficiary and the region as a whole.



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Summary table of group work

	ACCESS	LEARNING AND ATTRITION	PROGRESSION	NEXT STEPS AND ACTION POINTS
Pre-school education	<p>Access compulsory preparatory pre-school programme</p> <p>Need for legal provision followed with the budgetary allocations</p> <p>Curricula suitable for inclusive education needed – group recommends open curricula</p>	<p>pre school teachers competences for inclusive education</p> <p>Interventions on the pre and in service training necessary – lifelong learning</p>	<p>Pre-school participates in transition to primary school</p> <p>Pre-school institutions have pedagogical-psychological profiles of children prepared in coordination with parents</p> <p>Protocol cooperation related to transition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Study models of cooperation between preparatory programmes and primary school within SEE and other countries; identify and disseminate good practices</li> <li>- Continue developing forms of pre-school or preparatory programmes for children coming from vulnerable groups</li> <li>- Promote pre-primary education as compulsory part of education and ensuring sufficient resources (financial, human, facilities)</li> <li>- Ensure that there is protocol in place for sharing information between pre-primary education and primary education particularly regarding children with special needs and children coming from disadvantaged groups to ensure that there is continuum of support services.</li> <li>- Focus on development of well qualified teaching force.</li> <li>- Develop M&amp;E systems which would track both out-of-school children and attendance of children in pre-schools.</li> <li>- Promote cross-sectoral cooperation and targeting support to families in need.</li> </ul>
Primary education	<p>expand and specify indicators for securing quality education with including indicators for inclusion</p> <p>change of mindsets in</p>	<p>Accrediting only such inservice-training programmes which include elements in inclusive education</p> <p>Develop affirmative actions to vulnerable groups to enter</p>	<p>Change mind sets in which communities are more supporting to inclusions; promote strong links and involving communities in schools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure that the initial teacher training includes strengthening teachers' capacity to identify and support different kinds of learning needs.</li> <li>- Guide people from vulnerable groups to become teachers and promote scholarships to be targeted to them for this purpose.</li> <li>- Develop policies to track absenteeism and for identification of students in risk for drop-out (also at school level).</li> </ul>



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	communities	teaching profession		
Secondary education	improvement of information system on inclusive support measures	<p>support measures should be available at all levels</p> <p>teacher training - in-service training: compulsory module (even master studies) and exam; recognition of children at risk to drop-out and vulnerability; important for learning process not only to give information but to influence and change attitudes</p> <p>development of resource centres with mobile teams of professionals who will work with teachers in field</p>	improvement of information system on inclusive support measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of resource centres with mobile teams of professionals who will work with teachers in field</li> <li>- Include a compulsory module on IE in every teacher initial teacher training programme to help teachers to recognise children at risk to drop-out and vulnerability; This is needed not only to give information but to influence and change attitudes</li> <li>- improve information systems on inclusive support measures</li> </ul>



Joint European Union and Council of Europe Project „Regional Support for Inclusive Education“

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<p>VET</p>	<p>Targeted and diversified guidance services at the end of primary education</p> <p>Enhanced cooperation between primary schools and VET</p> <p>Identification of pupils at risk of dropout</p>	<p>Individual plans for pupils</p> <p>Teacher training (pre service + in service)</p> <p>Integration of inclusiveness issues in school development plan (school self-evaluation and quality assurance)</p>	<p>Partial qualification – all students get access to labour market</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Simple, low-cost measures could include introduction of professional orientation and vocational guidance and counselling already at the primary level to help children to be aware of all possibilities. This could be introduced also as an extra-curricular activity.</li> <li>- School management should be supportive and schools should develop stimulating mechanisms for teachers.</li> <li>- Measures targeting students should include mentoring of assistants for the transition for finding jobs and helping them in maintaining employment.</li> <li>- Intersectoral cooperation (schools and Ministries of Labour, etc.) should be promoted and laws on social entrepreneurships and their connection with schools should be tackled.</li> </ul>
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