

“Regional Support for Inclusive Education”

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FIRST MEETING OF THE POLICY TEAM OF ALBANIA - *REPORT* -

Prepared by

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Focal Point for Albania

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Introduction

The first meeting of Policy Team of Albania was organized according to instructions of Project Officer in charge of PolicyNet Component of the Joint EU/CoE Project “Regional Support for Inclusive Education”, hereinafter referred to as JP on Inclusive Education.

Date: Tuesday, 11th February 2014, 11.00 -16.00

Place: Tirana, Sheraton Tirana Hotel

Participants: 8 (out of 10) members of the Policy Team of Albania including the Focal Point, JP on Inclusive Education staff from the CoE Office in Tirana including Project Officer and Project Assistant, and a representative from the EU Delegation to Albania (Annex 1: Meeting Attendance List).

Moderator: Estevan Ikonimi, Member and Focal Point of Policy Team in Albania.

Preparation of the Meeting

The meeting was prepared by JP on Inclusive Education staff located in Tirana, in close coordination with the Focal Point, as agreed in advance.

The Meeting agenda (Annex 2) and presentations were proposed by Zorica Lesic, Project Officer in charge of Policy Component. Translation and adaptation of slide presentations on Policy Support Component was made by the Focal Point and its consistency checked by the JP on Inclusive Education Officer. Logistic support throughout the process was provided by project staff.

Presentation of the Project and Policy Component

The JP on Inclusive Education Officer in Albania presented the Project, using a slide presentation, focusing on its objectives and five components.

The Focal Point presented, through a slide presentation (Annex 3), the Policy Component and its main function vis-à-vis other components. He elaborated on its key objectives, the PolicyNet action framework, a summary of issues and policy gaps prepared by the team of experts during the Belgrade Meeting, the roles of Policy Team and Focal Point, and the structure and expected results of Regional PolicyNet.

Discussion, Questions and Comments of Participants

Following each presentation, a session on questions and discussions focused on questions ranging from beneficiary policy priorities and challenges facing the IE agenda in Albania to how the project might contribute to addressing them.

With regard to the Project, the EU Delegation office representative was interested to know about the timelines concerning the school grant allocations. It was explained that this process depends on factors such as the identification of needs through the baseline study and that the project will make sure school proposals are submitted and processed on time

so that the grants are also disbursed in due time. Another question concerned the eligibility of Albanian schools to receive sizable grants in their semi-official bank accounts. However, one of the participants, representative of the SchoolNet, and the MoES representative guaranteed that this is possible.

With regard to the Policy component, the participants engaged in numerous discussions on issues and challenges the most prominent of which are grouped in a table presented in the next section of this report. They were largely in line with those presented, and later collated, in the report of the Belgrade Expert Team Meeting whereas reference was also made to the Conclusions from the Policy Workshop Report in Tirana’s Regional Conference.

Further to identification of issues and challenges, attempts were made to come up with proposals on how to address some of the concerns and gaps in provision. While generating a common understanding of IE-related terminology at all education levels could be addressed by a specific ordinance issued by the MoES, other issues such as curricular integration of IE concepts could be done *now* as the revision of the national curricular framework for grades 1-9 is currently underway.

Another proposal aiming at amplifying the impact of the PolicyNet concerned the possibility to include project-specific issues and suggestions in the current training series, modules and/or other activities of other ongoing accredited programmes, the Pestalozzi being one of them.

Further to planned presentations, Mrs Tatjana Vuçani, a MoES representative and concurrently a Project board member, presented briefly the MoES’ project on community schools, currently underway, and discussed ways of eventual collaboration.

Outputs of the Meeting

Each Policy Team member proposed and discussed on a number of priority issues and challenges. In the end, the team members were encouraged to prioritise them by ranking each issue in accordance to its importance or emergency. The outcomes are as follows:

Level/type of institutions	Issues by level/type of institutions	Cross-cutting issues and challenges
Primary education	<p>Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing good school-level practices not well-known and/or promoted - schools’ and teachers’ hesitation <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absence of formal evaluations of good practices - overcrowded classes in urban areas 	<p>1. Issue:</p> <p>Gaps in legislation in favour of IE regarding specific and cross-sector/-thematic by-laws, integration and common understanding of IE concepts and terminology, and supporting teacher and</p>

	- accessibility in rural areas	school methodologies
General secondary education	<p>Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low awareness about and support to promotion of diversity in schools <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficult transition from basic to secondary education - Subject teachers lacking pre-service teacher training 	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of clear institutional responsibilities regarding translation into sub-national and school level instructions - Existing ambiguous terminology in use <p>2. Issue:</p> <p>Insufficient support to teachers (incl. pre-service and in-service provision, ineffective mentoring schemes, etc.)</p> <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - absence or scarcity of IE-relevant modules in pre-service teacher training programmes - differences in individual teachers' perception of their roles - unfunded in-service teacher-training provision <p>3. Issue:</p> <p>Insufficient integration of IE and diversity in applied curricula</p> <p>Challenges:</p> <p>Lack of resources</p>
Secondary education-VET	<p>Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low awareness about and support to promotion of diversity in schools - missing links with the labour market <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of tradition in working with diversity 	

Among other issues discussed, not fully appearing in this table, are those concerning *definitions and terminology in IE*, their understanding and the need for cross-documentary unification, and the *scarcity of qualitative and quantitative disaggregated data* in education crucial to informing sound policy decisions and actions.

Cross- beneficiary Teams:

Level/type of institutions	Names of Members Cross-beneficiary Team
Primary education	1. Valentina Veçani 2. Mirela Kondili 3. Irida Sina
General secondary education	1. Tatjana Vuçani 2. Mirash Shkurti 3. Merita Myftari
Secondary education –VET	1. Ilda Bozo* 2. Agron Pullumbi* 3. Zela Koka

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

* These members were not present in the First Policy Team Meeting therefore their participation in the Secondary Education–VET team is to be confirmed.

Conclusions of the Meeting

The First Policy Team Meeting largely achieved its aim. There is an understanding on the JP on Inclusive Education vision and expected results as well as on the expected role of the Policy Team.

Despite slight individual differences, participants agreed largely on the key issues facing the IE Policy agenda in Albania and were able to identify its main challenges. Furthermore, particular members were keen to discuss on the course of singular and collective policy actions required to address those issues.

All participants present in the meeting engaged effectively and pro-actively throughout all discussions demonstrating a keen interest to play a role in team efforts as well as within the overall project framework of action.