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Schools and Diversity Workshop

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The workshop on School and diversity worked with 30 interested participants who volunteered for this topic prior to the seminar. The participants, a mixed group of school heads, teachers, representatives of ministries and NGOs, came from all seven beneficiaries of the project.

The workshop discussions were organised around three key issues structured in accordance with Booth and Ainscow's principle of Index of inclusiveness observed through the angle of school development.

- Creating **inclusive school cultures** (building community, establishing inclusive values);
- Producing **inclusive school policies** (developing the school for all, organising support for diversity);
- Evolving **inclusive school practice**(orchestrating learning, mobilising resources)

The workshop participants were randomly divided into three groups.

Existing practice - realities and challenges



The objective of the morning session was to analyse the realities and identify existing practices and challenges in schools in the beneficiary countries.

At the very beginning of the workshop, the participants briefly introduced themselves and underlined in a few words the key statement that describe their reality when dealing with inclusiveness and diversity in their working environment.

As a general point, **diversity is present in the SEE region** in all its aspects, and the **understanding of inclusiveness varies from school to school depending on the reality and challenges** the school is facing. There is a **wide palette of tools (manuals, e-content) available** in the region that tackles this issue. In some of the countries, the issue of inclusiveness is dealt by **specialised teams of experts** that organise around **mobile teams** operational on national level. In most of the countries teachers use **individual educational**



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plans to adapt to the needs of an individual or groups of pupils with special needs. There is a record of **assistant teachers** that specialise in work with pupils with learning difficulties. The issue of inclusive approach is also present in the field of **adult education**.

There are **awareness raising events** organised which are supported by **national strategies**. But the need for further assistance and promotion is obvious from the discussions in the workshop.

Cross-border cooperation between schools is recorded among regions that share a large percentage of national minorities.

When describing **current challenges in the field**, the participants reflected on the **large percentage of drop-outs** among the Roma children and children from deprived families. An issue with **access to further, especially higher, education** was also observed.

There is a need for **improved pre-service and in-service teacher development** and training for improved school management as well as **increased work with parents**.

The participants underlined the benefit of **exchange of best practices in the region** to break down the barriers and get beyond stereotypes and prejudice in this field.

A list of all existing practices and current challenges available are at the end of the document.

Future action steps

In the afternoon session, the workshop tried to address **the issue of the future action steps** to tackle the challenges and improve the situation in schools in coherent, planned and sustainable manner.

Working on the same principle of division between the school culture, policies and practice, the participants reached following conclusions.

Level of school culture:

- Development of a “**school vision**” (in a form of a school document, logo, motto of the school) reflecting a common understanding of specific inclusive values the school will commit to and promote. Raise awareness within the school about the “*school vision*” and increase motivation of school staff.



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- Establish cooperation and networking with **local media** in order to **raise school visibility** through example of successful real practices and to **raise general awareness** among of the local communities about importance of inclusiveness;

Level of school policies:

- Establishment of **in-school teams** (at school level) responsible for reflecting a specific challenge that their school is facing (cultural diversity/drop-outs etc.) and to propose concrete actions to the school board. Different in-school teams can be established to deal with different issues, and could be composed of school staff, teachers and parents;
- **Inclusive values and actions** foreseen in National inclusive strategies and/or National action plans to be reflected/**incorporated in school policies** and school development programmes;
- Preparation of **mid-term school development plans**(4 to 8 years) foreseeing necessary adaptations/adjustments a school has to arrange in order to meet students' special needs;
- **Partnership and networking with other schools** (in-country or cross-border) in order to share experiences and practices;

Level of school practices:

- Improve **parents participation** involving them in school life at all levels, in order for parents to become real school and teacher partners;
- Organise **extra-school cultural/sporting activities** bringing together all children to promote team spirit and encourage inclusion of children with SEN;
- Encourage “**students mentoring**”, showing how children can assist each other;

Reflections / suggestions on the process

From the discussions it became obvious that **there is interest and awareness** about the theme in the field, yet there is **lack of clear definitions** of inclusiveness and diversity education depending on the local reality in the field. For some regions the first association with inclusiveness is connected almost exclusively with the idea of SEN students or Roma students, while in other regions inclusiveness is synonymous with integration of students of migrant families and work/conflict migrations.

It is also clear that all countries try to deal with this issue at national level mostly through national strategies. It is also noted that the **national strategies do not “translate” easily into the field.**



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For most of the participants in the workshop this was the first opportunity to meet with peers from the region and **examples of good practice were well received** and discussed in the working groups.

There is an **issue of more sustainable approach** to the issue of inclusiveness. The mid-term plans and inclusion of whole school staff and local community in this issue shows good results.

There is a very **close link with the policy makers** at national level, school level policies and teaching practice in the classroom.

All participants in the workshop expressed their **desire to learn more** about the theme and to learn from each other in the process.

Overview of existing practices/realities:

- Multi-lingual / multi-ethnic / multi-cultural / multi-confessional school environment
- Children with special educational needs (SEN) / different types of disability / impairments
- Children from minority groups / Roma children
- E-learning / distance learning
- Teachers supported with specialised manuals on inclusion
- Teacher assisted from mobile expert teams
- Teaching adjusted to individual needs/possibilities through Individual educational plans (IEPs)
- Schools supported from local communities/municipality/NGOs
- School population mixed from rural and urban areas
- Resource centres supporting schools
- Assistant teacher present in classrooms
- Adult education
- Talented children
- Assistive technologies
- Committed school staff
- Awareness raised at all levels based on real stories
- National Inclusive Strategies and action plans translated into schools policies and programmes
- Parents councils existing in all schools
- Extra-school cultural and sportive activities fostering inclusiveness
- Cross-border cooperation between schools
- Students mentoring / children assisting children



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Overview of existing challenges:

- Drop-outs / irregular attendance at school by Roma children/children with low performance/children from economically deprived families
- Access to higher education of children with SENs
- Teacher in-service development to gain the skills/knowledge how to work with children with specific mental impairments
- School management
- Parents participation
- Awareness raising among the school community
- Early identification of children in need
- School staff motivation
- Exchange of practices/cooperation with other schools
- Building a safe environment for all children
- Break down barriers / stereotypes / prejudices

