

“Regional Support for Inclusive Education”

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by the Council of Europe



Final Conference

In the framework of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Chairmanship
of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers
Hosted by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina

5-6 November 2015
Parliament Building of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Sarajevo

Conference Report



CONFERENCE BACKGROUND



The Final Regional Conference of the Joint EU/COE Project “Regional Support for Inclusive Education” was held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina on 05-06 November 2015.

The conference was hosted by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and was organised in the framework of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Chairmanship of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers.

The objective of the Conference was to highlight the stakeholders’ achievements towards inclusive education and to outline and promote the regional policy recommendations upon which action plans were developed by and for the seven beneficiaries.

The participants included representatives of the relevant ministries and academic institutions, policymakers, educational professionals, members of the TeacherNet, SchoolNet and PolicyNet from seven beneficiaries in South East Europe, representatives of parents’ councils and local communities. Also

present were representatives of European Commission, European Training Foundation and partner organisations Network of Education Policy Centres. The conference of the largest regional cooperation effort in the field of education in South East Europe was attended by around 190 participants from the 7 beneficiaries of the region.

Opening speeches

Opening addresses started with Deputy Minister, Mr Đorđe Miličević. He welcomed the participants on behalf of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina and emphasized that the conference was organised in the framework of the Chairmanship of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers.

Welcome addresses continued with Mr Bo Caperman, Programme Manager, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Western Balkans Regional Cooperation and Programmes, from European Commission. Mr Caperman focused in his speech on the possibilities for the Western Balkans to access funding in the future, but also the sustainability of the results of this project and the importance of continued efforts to improve inclusive education.

Ms Mary Ann Hennessey, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo welcomed the participants on behalf of the Council of Europe. Ms Hennessey spoke about the general achievements of the project and its importance for the region. Ms Hennessey shared with the audience the information about recently launched Action Plan for Building Inclusive Societies by the Deputy Secretary General for all 47 member states for the next three years.

Ms Hennessey stressed that results and recommendations from this Project can and will be used as guidelines and inspiration.

Through the words of the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner, Nils Muižnieks where he emphasised that “European states can no longer afford to ignore modern societies’ need for inclusive education”, Ms Hennessey pointed also to the role of inclusive education in preventing extremism in societies in which we should all feel a part.

At the end of her speech Ms Hennessey stressed the importance of building a democratic school culture. This combination, on the one hand, of a democratic culture in schools and on the other specific support for vulnerable groups – such as this regional project on inclusive education – is the cornerstone of providing quality education systems for all students.

Ms Hennessey handed over the floor to Ms Sarah Keating, Head of Unit for Regional and Bilateral Co-operation in South East Europe and Turkey, Education Department, Council of Europe.

CONFERENCE SESSIONS

DAY I

SESSION I: REMOVING BARRIERS

Session I “Removing barriers” was chaired by Ms Sarah Keating. The aim of the session was to summarise the path the project has taken in implementing a set objectives and present the barriers encountered and results achieved.

Ms Keating gave a brief presentation of project’s objectives providing background on the rationale for a regional initiative, the vision of the project, creation of School, Policy and Teacher Networks as platforms for mutual learning. Ms Keating also introduced raising awareness campaign while more detailed presentation followed in the afternoon session.

Ms Keating then gave the floor to Ms Vesna Atanasova, Senior Project Officer, Unit for Regional and Bilateral Co-operation in South East Europe and Turkey, Education Department, Council of Europe.

Ms Atanasova provided introduction on how cultural, communicational, physical, psychological, financial, administrative and political barriers influenced the planning and implementation of the project’s actions. As Ms Atanasova stated that at the beginning of the project the team faced many challenges due to the lack of common understanding of the concept of inclusion, to many isolated cases of good inclusive practices that were not documented or shared, and a lack of thematic dialogue among the key stakeholders in inclusive education. In order to respond to these challenges, Ms Atanasova presented how the project used a grassroots approach, surveys and an awareness-raising campaign including: publications, public events, radio shows, videos, workshops, exhibitions, roundtables, newsletters, etc. on how to reach a common understanding of inclusion.

During the presentation, Ms Atanasova shared some numerical facts related to project participants and activities, from the year 1 of the project implementation where most of the activities were focused on laying the foundations to years 2 and 3 focusing on consolidating presence and mobilising the region.

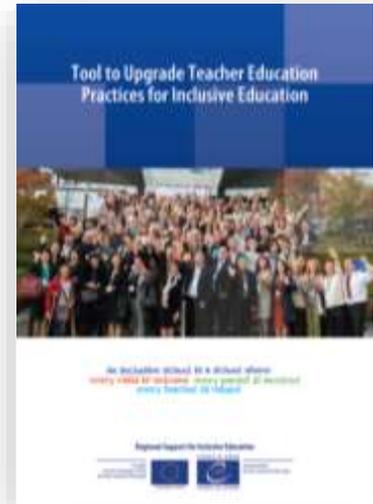
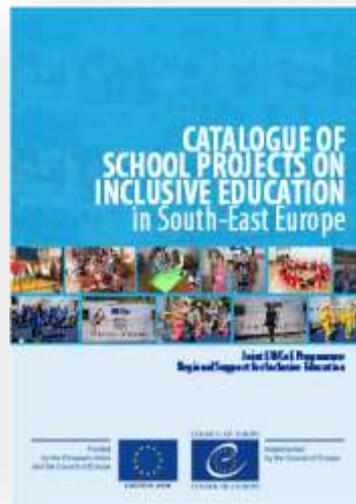
In order to support the documenting and sharing of cases of good inclusive practice, the project made efforts to recognise such cases, and provide spaces for sharing and learning among stakeholder through for example an inclusive education Expo, peer learning events and study visits. The project documented and published a Catalogue of School Projects on Inclusive Education funded with school grants to improve pilot school inclusive practice.

After an extensive mapping process to determine the situation related to teacher training programmes in the region, the project published a Tool to Upgrade Teacher Education Practices for Inclusive Education in cooperation with University of Zurich.

Quotes demonstrating the changes that occurred:

“This project has changed the thinking and attitudes towards the concept of INCLUSION... The word INCLUSION no longer creates hostility.... INCLUSION is a model of work, a way of life and behaviour, mutual cooperation and support...” School Team, “Jovan Jovanović Zmaj”, Primary School, Đurđevo

“During the project it was wonderful to feel how barriers were falling.” Zdenka Višnjić, Librarian



In order to introduce a dialogue and learning among all stakeholders, the project established 3 networks, supported peer learning events through regional project activities and via pilot school grants and raised the capacity of schools to actively participate in this dialogue through the “learning by doing” principle and mentorship support.

To share with the audience stories about removing barriers for mutual learning, the project invited representatives of the School, Teacher and Policy Nets.

Ms Gordana Nestorovska, a psychologist from Volkovo near Skopje, member of the School and Policy Nets talked about which activity within the School Network benefited her school the most. Gordana stressed that it was the exchange within the Network that helped her school improve her inclusive practice the most. They saw the projects other schools were implementing, compared plans and activities, and got ideas on how to promote inclusive practice, evaluate their work and find out the best way to improve school practice, culture and policies. Best practice examples were shared through the School Net. The School Net has helped overcome prejudice and all barriers be they language, cultural or social. Apart from mutual learning and sharing of experiences, the project has greatly contributed to raising awareness of all students, parents and the local community.

Mr Darko Kmezić, teacher in General secondary school “VII beogradska Gimnazija” from Belgrade shared his experience about how Teacher Net influenced his professional growth. This included gaining a better understanding of what inclusion means, how it has influenced his teaching practice, and relying on the support of his students and taking into consideration their opinions.

One of the biggest changes for him was his greater willingness to embrace the changes inclusive education brings, to step out of his comfort zone and change his practice for the benefit of all his students. For him as well, discussions with other colleagues from other schools were the most useful. His work within Teacher Net helped him see the benefits of inclusive education for the whole society, not just for one particular child.

Member of the Policy Net and teacher in the primary school “Blažo Jokov Orlandić” from Bar, Ms Nataša Borović shared her impressions from this project and her involvement in Policy Net. Natasha shared her vision of the Policy Net as a platform for policy dialogue and policy learning as a platform to encourage a bottom-up approach in the identifying and scaling up of best practices from the pilot schools, but also to strengthening capacities of the policy-makers to create and implement inclusive education policies based on real evidences and lessons learned. Cooperation in the Policy Net brought stronger cooperation and team building among the seven beneficiaries from the region.

At the end of the session, the speakers were given the opportunity to share what motivates them to continue working in inclusive education and the shared opinion was the deep conviction that inclusive education is for the benefit of the society as a whole.



After these inspiring conclusions, the session was closed with the taking of a family photo of all participants present.

SESSION II: RAISING AWARENESS

The goal of session II was to present the work that has been done in raising awareness of the general public and education sector about what inclusive education means and how it benefits the society as a whole.

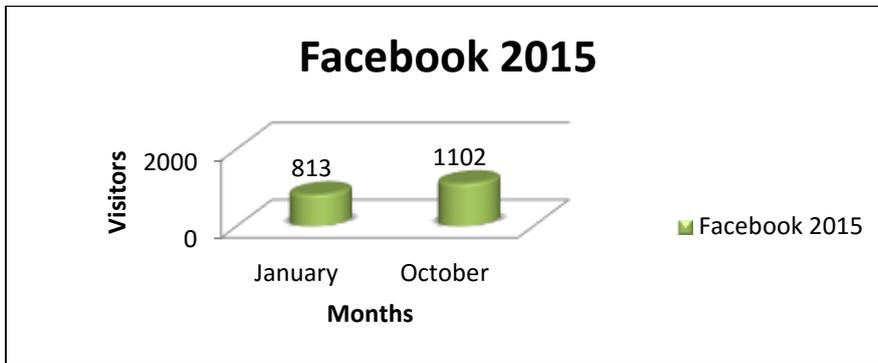
Ms Jadranka Mihić, Programme Manager at the Delegation of the European Commission in Bosnia and Herzegovina chaired the session. Ms Mihić presented visibility activities within the project including: project leaflet, Webpage, newsletter, Facebook page, web platform and school catalogue. As part of the awareness-raising campaign, Ms Mihić highlighted the extensive efforts of the project to share the ideas and benefits of inclusive education via a regional celebrities' video clip, Educational TV and radio programmes, Inclusive days, a 30 minute talk show on Aljazeera, a Euronews documentary and EXPO for inclusion (260 initiatives on inclusive education in 7 beneficiaries)

The next speaker was Mr David Addis, communication expert, who shared with the audience information about the targets groups of the campaign:

- a) *Internally*: For members of staff, pilot schools etc. to reinforce what is being done and create a team spirit.
- b) *Externally*: For the general audience - to promote the concept of inclusive education.

For many stakeholders, one of the challenges was how to distinguish which audience they should target and in which way. Mr Addis stressed the importance of social network and presented statistics of visitors on the project's Facebook page.





Graph: number of “likes” in 2015

The next speaker was Ms Ema Maglič, “Inclusive day” coordinator on behalf of the Production Company “Dokument”. Ms Maglič spoke about public reach of raising awareness activities (graph on the right), with specific focus on Inclusive Day events that were organised simultaneously in all 7 beneficiaries. These events were organised by the Production Company “Dokument” and host pilot schools from the project. The aim of the Inclusive day was to present to general public achievements in the projects, share project values and benefits of inclusive education. These events occurred on public squares and parks and were attended by great number of people. Students from pilot schools shared their talents, thoughts, beliefs and activities they do in their school with the general public.



Mr Suad Masleša is a class teacher from the general secondary school “Srednjoškolski centar Hadžići”, Sarajevo (a host school for the Inclusive day). He shared a story about a student with Down’s syndrome and his experience of being in the school and his willingness to be independent. Mr Masleša also shared what the school did to meet his needs and how these measures helped the student to feel included and valued.

Mr Masleša also shared a story about a 25 year-old student in a wheelchair who was accepted in the school and how happy he felt that he was now able to take care of himself and attend classes just because the school has been made wheelchair accessible. This student did not have a chance to attend lessons before, but thanks to this project, he is getting the education he has the right to.

SESSION III: CHANGING APPROACHES

The chair of the session was Ms Lana Jurko, executive director from the Network of Education Policy Centres (NEPC). Ms Jurko briefly described the School Net component and the goal of interventions at the school level (changing school culture, policies and practices). She pointed out the three key areas that support inclusion (cooperation, catering to diversity and taking responsibilities) and introduced the panellists: Mr Matko Guštin, a student from the Vocational secondary school “Ekonomska I upravna škola”, Osijek, Ms Rozeta Hoxhallari, NEPC, Albania, Mr Ramo Kolašinac, Center for Vocational Education, Podgorica and Ms Sabine Rohmann, Head of Unit for European and International Relations (in-service training), Pädagogisches Landesinstitut – Rheinland-Pfalz.

The goal of this session was to present panellists' experiences on *Changing School Cultures, Policies and Practices*:



- a) how cooperation improves inclusion at all levels;
- b) how can schools cater to diversity beyond national policies;
- c) who is responsible for inclusion at the school level and what is their role in it;
- d) from the perspective of the Greater Region, what are the 3 primary areas for intervention when talking about inclusion.

Mr Matko Guštin gave examples of cooperation from school life, about how the voice of students were represented in school policies, cooperation with parents and the open door policy in changing school culture; how does the creation of teacher teams improve school practices; how necessary it is to develop students' critical thinking as a premise of free and democratic schooling and that inclusive values and beliefs of all education staff in the school including parents and students form an essential foundation for an inclusive school.

Based on the school projects, Ms Rozeta Hoxhallari presented how schools can cater to diversity through better parental involvement, ownership of the process of change, school development planning, development of school policy, raising awareness, involvement of students and parents in decision-making, etc.

Mr Kolašinac talked about the role of teachers, school administration, students, parents and community in making a school more inclusive. He stated peer support as one of the crucial elements of change in the school.

Ms Rohmann agreed that the necessary changes must occur in all three areas - school culture, practices and policies. A school should be a place for learning and living together for all, she stated, and it needs to be fully integrated in the community. Schools need to open their doors to everyone, including parents, and teachers need to understand that their profession is a life-long learning process. By living in an ever-changing society, schools need to learn how to change and adapt quickly, which is one of the biggest challenges of education systems. Ms Rohmann also spoke about how the role of the teacher has changed and how teachers are facilitators rather than imposers of knowledge. Ms Rohmann emphasised the importance of peer learning during study visits between teachers from the Greater Region and South East Europe.

Ms Hoxhallari gave the perspective of NGOs on which parts of the project can be used and reused to improve inclusion: support to team work between all school staff, the importance of awareness-raising, participatory school development planning and delegated action plans, exchanges of experience and practice, open classes as a method of peer learning, students and parents participation in decision-making, individual support teams, improved lesson plans, peer learning between different schools and peer learning on a national level, etc.

Ms Rohmann stressed the importance of the role of the teacher in developing sustainable societies, but also emphasised the importance of developing transversal competencies. Mr Kolašinac added that it is crucial to work on changing attitudes and the values of society as a whole and that the role of the schools

is to teach students to live in a changing world. This session inspired a discussion among the panellists and participants and some of the key messages were the importance of making these actions sustainable through the involvement of all relevant stakeholders including employers.

DAY II

SESSION I

The **second day** of the final conference opened with a panel discussion on the implementation of the policy recommendations and sustainability of results achieved by the project.

The role and the concrete outputs of the PolicyNet groups in developing policy recommendations were presented by the chair of this panel **Ms Snežana Vuković**, Steering Board member from Serbia who emphasised the bottom-up approach of the project in designing the regional policy recommendations.

Ms Tatjana Vučani, steering board member for Albania explained how the Albanian Policy Team envisaged incorporating the regional recommendations on inclusive education in the existing beneficiary policies. In particular she informed participants of the set of concrete actions that were taken by the Ministry of Education and Sports in the Republic of Albania based on the six recommendations for Albania, and which include a number of measures designed to promote inclusive education and further protect disadvantaged and marginalised students, to carry on the work of pilot schools through their inclusion in the initiative “The Schools as a Community Centre”, the gradual transformation of special schools and special institutes into resource centres, drafting of a Code of Ethics for teachers, and the creation of a network of coordinators against discrimination and violence based on gender.

Ms Nada Jakir, the steering board member for Croatia, explained the new perspectives and opportunities opened in the field of inclusive education as a result of Croatian membership in the European Union. In particular she mentioned the possibility of securing additional funding for inclusive education, primarily using the funds from the European Social Fund through *the Operational Program Efficient Human Resources 2014-2020* developed by Croatian ministries, including the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, which would be used at the higher education level, to improve the match between skills and jobs and increasing students’ employability. The ESF will also be used to increase the scope of direct support to students from lower socio economic backgrounds to help them access and successfully complete their studies.



Ms Jakir finally pointed out that the Croatian membership in the EU enabled accession to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education that is the European body that helps EU member states in improving quality and effectiveness of their inclusive provision for learners with disabilities and special educational needs.

Ms Lida Kita, member of the Steering Board and representative of the European Training Foundation suggested a number of ways that the beneficiaries could build on the project's achievements and how to take forward the project results. Ideas included the establishment of a regional teachers association, enhanced transnational cooperation, supporting actions to improve equity in education, strengthening cooperation between the world of education and the world of work, and enhancing the skills and competences of professionals in the fields of education.

The panel discussions were followed by an interactive Questions & Answers session addressing the sustainability of the projects results through systematic approaches. Participants who took the floor highly praised the work of the project and requested the need for a follow-up phase.

The conference was closed by acknowledging the role of the members of the Steering Board in guiding, steering and facilitating the entire process in the region.

The final conference ended on a very positive note, with stakeholders and participants inspired to sustain and take forward the achievements of this project through national or regional follow up.

