

STUDY REPORT

**FACING THE CHALLENGES
OF INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION IN ALBANIA**

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REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
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ACCESS
ALBANIAN CENTER OF EXCELLENCE
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ACRONYMS

GoA – Government of Albania

CwD – Children with Disability

UNICEF - United Nations Children’s Fund

OECD - Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

PISA - Programme for International Student Assessment

MoES – Ministry of Education and Sports

WHO – World Health Organization

ETF – European Training Foundation

IED - Institute for Education Development

CADE - Convention against Discrimination in Education

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ICESCR - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

FGD - Focus Group Discussions

REA – Regional Education Authority

NGO – Non – governmental organization

MSc – Master of Science

IEP - Individual Education Plans

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Inclusive education means different and diverse pupils learning side by side in the same classroom. Inclusive systems provide a better quality education for all children and are instrumental in changing discriminatory attitudes.

According to UNICEF (2015) inclusive education is responsive to student-needs and relevant to their life. Therefore, Inclusive Education is not about teaching the students who can cope with an un-responsive educational system. Inclusive Education is the means by which teaching methods, curriculum, staff and pedagogy support and are adapted to the learning of ALL students, including those students who traditional systems have not been able to reach.

Inclusive Education is informed by seven basic principles of human rights: universality and inalienability; indivisibility; interdependence and interrelatedness; equality and non-discrimination; participation and inclusion; empowerment; and accountability and respect for the rule of law.

The Albanian education system and its complexity are a heritage of a series of historical, political and social developments in the country. The right to education for all children even though it is included in the legislation, it seems that it creates a conflict with the rooted practices and structures of the Albanian society. Nowadays, education structures and attitudes that have been developed for more than five decades coexist with the new models of inclusion of children with disabilities and vulnerable children in mainstream schools.

The legal framework in Albania warrants the right to education for all children, regardless of their needs and special abilities. Law Nr. 69 of 2012 “On Pre – university education” calls for free and mandatory education and it applies to children aged 6-16 years old. Underlying the process of inclusion is the assumption that the general classroom teacher has certain knowledge and understanding about the needs of different learners, teaching techniques and curriculum strategies.

The aim of this study is to identify the gaps that hinder in-service and pre-service education

practitioners in delivering inclusive education.

The specific objectives of the study derive from its aim and consist in:

- Assessing the needs and identifying the challenges of in – service practitioners in relation to their current work in inclusive education environments, in view of their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs and practices;
- Exploring the potential hindering and favouring factors for practicing inclusive education;
- Reviewing the existing education university curricula and identifying the gaps in relation to inclusive education;
- Exploring the professors' knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding inclusive education;
- Reviewing of the New Curricula Framework for pre – university education and assessing the level in which issues related to inclusive education are part of it;
- Drawing conclusions and recommendations to define the need for improvement of the pre-service inclusive curricula and addressing the challenges of in – service practitioners.

The study employed a qualitative methodology. In – depth interviews were conducted with representatives of the Regional Education Directories, while FGDs were conducted with teachers and professors. Alongside with these methods, content analysis of the university curricula as well as of the specific course syllabuses was carried out, in view of inclusive education theoretical knowledge and field practice. Participants of this study were in – service teachers in four different regions in Albania as well as university professors from the Departments of Education, Social Work and Psychology. The included regions were Durres, Shkoder, Gjirokaster and Tirana.

Main findings

In – service teaching experience

- Teachers still have lack of information in relation to inclusive education, they are trying to be informed through internet, informal sharing of experience and other informal means; for many of them inclusive education was not even a course in their university studies;
- Trainings or other qualifications provided by NGOs in Albania relevant to inclusive education had an impact in informing and changing teachers' attitudes and practices;
- More qualified and trained teachers were more positive and optimist in relation to the inclusive education implementation in Albania, an indicator that calls for further teacher qualification on this subject;
- Rural area teachers face more challenges in relation to inclusive education: psychosocial

experts don't go to these schools, children with disabilities don't have a chance to be put on an appropriate class, parents' are more close – minded in accepting their children's difficulties and school infrastructure is not satisfying;

- There is an evident lack of qualified assistant teachers, even when they are appointed they are very few in relation to the needs and not qualified for this job, even though teachers who have information for CwD are not always informed on working with vulnerable children in general;
- Teachers face challenges in developing an IEP due to their lack of knowledge and understanding the way IEP should be developed, the assessment methods for CwD, the developmental milestones for CwD;
- A major problem for teachers are children that are not diagnosed and that their parents deny their disability; therefore teachers are not entitled to have a class with a smaller number of children or ask for an assistant teacher or work with a IEP;
- In general, teachers hold positive attitudes towards inclusive education, for every child. They embrace its values and prefer diversity over homogeneity;
- The New Education Curricula has a more inclusive approach, is child – centred and promotes equal opportunities; however inclusion needs to be mainstreamed in all disciplines and implemented in a precise manner.

Pre – service teacher education

- Participating higher education institutions showed a tendency to relate inclusive education **only** with CwD and not with all children, this was also evident on the curricula and content of the syllabuses;
- Faculties of Education and respective Departments have included a course on inclusive education at their Bachelor and Master level, however this course is focused on Cwd and it doesn't contain any information on other vulnerable children that require the same attention by the teacher;
- Specific information on working with children with different needs (all vulnerable children) alongside with the theoretical information is much needed in all curricula;
- Relevant courses like Didactics and Teaching Methods don't have any information on inclusive education and on how to work with diverse pupils and particularly vulnerable children;
- Professors perceive that their departments are still preparing traditional mainstream teachers and not inclusive, even though their curriculum has been changed and adapted the last years;
- None of the higher education institutions of the study released a degree for an “assistant teacher”; however all the departments of Education would seriously consider establishing a

Master's degree on this profile, although this course does not replace the need that all teachers should have an inclusive teacher profile regardless of being assistant or mainstream;

- Inclusion values are mainstreamed in the curriculum of all Faculties and Departments, particularly at the Department of Social Work and Social Policy;

Recommendations

Recommendations for the **in service inclusive education** experience are based on the empirical findings of the study. Specifically, recommendations for the in – service education system are:

- In the medium term the development and issuing of inclusive education teacher standards as well as policy guidelines for schools to use in recruiting and assessing staff are considered crucial;
- Awareness raising and capacity building of teachers in relation to inclusive education, through planning further qualifications and trainings for all teachers;
- The development of a formal active network of teachers in which they can exchange experiences and share information is considered necessary;
- Further qualification of mainstream teachers and assistant teachers in working with children with disabilities and provide support for the development of IEPs;
- Restructure and re – organize the workload for psychosocial experts in order for them to assist better the schools, teachers and children;
- Assistant teachers should be appointed for every child that needs them, based on the Law on Pre – University Education; the MoES should increase the total number of teachers in order to include and plan the budget for assistant teachers;

For the pre – service education it is suggested:

- For the Faculties of Education: to review their curricula and include more courses on inclusive education and diverse classroom and to widen the information given at the current courses aiming at providing modern practices in the field of inclusive education;
- To include information in relation to working with children with disabilities and relevant developmental milestones for them;
- To review the didactic practices and provide specific information on Teaching Methods or Didactics regarding different methods of working with CwD and other vulnerable groups of children, particularly for the secondary school;
- To intertwine teaching practice and theory in order for future teachers to feel confidence in working in diverse classrooms;

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education means different and diverse pupils learning side by side in the same classroom. Inclusive systems provide a better quality education for all children and are instrumental in changing discriminatory attitudes. The inclusive education approach is based on an essential principle: all children should learn together, besides their differences and challenges. Children can enjoy together not only the teaching hours and classroom activities but also after-school activities or field trips.

Education for all has always been an integral part of the sustainable development agenda, but it gained even more attention in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which the 4th goal refers to: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”¹. It emphasizes the elimination of gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable. In addition, the agenda calls for building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and also provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all². Additionally, there is a need to recognise that legislation, funding, curriculum, assessment and accountability should be considered holistically if they are to support a move towards more inclusive practice in which teacher education plays a key role³.

During the last decade considerable efforts have been made to promote and enable an inclusive learning environment in Albanian elementary and secondary schools, and many of these efforts targeted the pre - university education⁴. The Government of Albania (GoA) has a relatively new Law for

1 United Nations (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication> accessed on December 2015

2 ibid

3 European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2010). Teacher education for inclusion: an international literature review. Denmark.

4 Tahsini, Voko, Duci and Hallkaj (2014). Inclusion practices in Albanian preschool system. Save the Children in Albania

Pre – university education (2012)⁵ and normative clauses (Normative Dispositions, 2013), which sets the ground to revision of National Strategy for Pre-University Education. The new Law and its normative dispositions include the respective articles on education and particularly on inclusion of children with disabilities (CwD). One of the obligations of the education institutions is to ensure an assistant teacher for CwD. However, in Albania there is no recognized university degree as “assistant teacher” for CwD and this has created a gap in implementing the law. Besides that, inclusive education does not only relate to children with disabilities. **It relates to establishing an inclusive teacher profile starting from the pre – service/university studies to in – service teachers’ qualification. An inclusive teacher should value learner’s diversity, support all learners, works with others and develops professionally⁶.**

Underlying the process of inclusion is the assumption that the mainstream classroom teacher has certain knowledge and understanding about the needs of different learners, teaching techniques and curriculum strategies⁷. Florian and Rouse (2009) state: ‘The task of initial teacher education is to prepare people to enter a profession which accepts individual and collective responsibility for improving the learning and participation of all children’ (p. 596)⁸.

In Albania, expertise is gradually evolving in the delivery of good models in inclusive education, and these experiences should be considered the basis for practice - oriented teacher development. However, in the medium term the development and issuing of inclusive education teacher standards as well as policy guidelines for schools to use in recruiting and assessing staff are considered crucial.

For UNICEF inclusive education is not a marginal issue, but is central to the achievement of high quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies. It is a broad concept that includes all groups of children. UNICEF education programming covers all groups of children, paying particular attention to children at risk of being excluded from education⁹. Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve Education for All. As an overall principle, it should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society.

5 Law Nr. 69 of 2012 “On Pre – university education”

6 UNICEF (2015). Inclusive Education: Vision, Theory and Concepts. Retrieved from <http://www.inclusive-education.org/basic-page/unicef-trainer-trainers-modules-inclusive-education> accessed on February 2016,

7 European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2010). Teacher education for inclusion: an international literature review. Denmark.

8 Florian, L. and Rouse, M. (2009) The inclusive practice project in Scotland: *Teacher education for inclusive education*. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25 (4), 594-601

9 UNICEF (2015). Draft ToT Modules on Inclusive Education Introductory Booklet.

In order to explore and address these issues the UNICEF in Albania in collaboration with the Institute of Public Opinion Studies have undertaken a research focused on the assessment of the in – service and pre – service inclusive education situation in four different cities in Albania. The study puts a special emphasis to the inclusive practices of teachers and focuses on how mainstream teachers are prepared via their initial training to be ‘inclusive’.

1.1. Aim and objectives of the study

It is important to tackle and address all the underlying causes and gaps for inclusive education in Albania. As mentioned above, in order to achieve a double – folded approach it is required to assess the needs of the in – service teachers as well as their pre – service qualifications..

In response to these needs, this *study aims to identify the gaps that hinder in-service and pre-service teachers or students in delivering inclusive education.*

Objectives

The specific objectives of the study derive from its aim and consist in:

- Assessing the needs and identifying the challenges of in – service practitioners in relation to their current work in inclusive education environments, in view of their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs and practices;
- Exploring the potential hindering and favouring factors for practicing inclusive education;
- Reviewing the existing university curricula and identifying the gaps in relation to inclusive education;
- Exploring the professor’s knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding inclusive education;
- Reviewing of the New Curricula Framework for pre – university education and assessing the level in which issues related to inclusive education are part of it
- Drawing conclusions and recommendations to define the need for improvement of the pre-service inclusive curriculum and addressing the challenges of in – service practitioners.

1.2. Definitions of inclusion

There are different definitions for inclusive education in primary and secondary education. Some of these definitions are widely used and accepted and others are still developing considering the dynamics

in the field of inclusion and inclusive education.

According to the Salamanca Statement “Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups”¹⁰ Although the immediate focus of the Salamanca Conference was on special needs education, its conclusion was that: “Special needs education – an issue of equal concern to countries of the North and of the South – cannot advance in isolation. It has to form part of an overall educational strategy and, indeed, of new social and economic policies. It calls for major reform of the ordinary school”¹¹

Inclusive education means that all pupils attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all pupils learn and participate together.

For the purposes of this study **inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education.** It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children¹².

Access, participation and support are all necessary to ensure that the needs and priorities of preschool children are met. Specifically,

- Access - a defining feature of high quality inclusion is access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments.
- Participation - Some children will need additional individualized accommodations and support to participate fully in play and learning activities with peers and adults.
- Supports - An infrastructure of systems-level supports must be in place to undergird the efforts of

10 The Salamanca Statement And Framework For Action On Special Needs Education (paragraph 4). Retrieved from <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/inclusive-education/what-is-inclusive-education/> accessed on December 2015

11 UNESCO (2009). Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education. UNESCO. Retrieved from Paris.<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001778/177849e.pdf> accessed on December 2015

12 UNESCO. 2003b. Overcoming Exclusion through Inclusive Approaches in Education. A challenge and a vision. Paris, UNESCO.

individuals and organizations providing inclusive services to children and families¹³

Inclusive education is not only about issues of input, such as access, and those related to processes such as teacher training, but it involves a shift in underlying values and beliefs, along with very specific approaches, positions, and solutions. A broad range of strategies at all levels are needed to realize the right of all children to inclusive education:

- Government wide measures to establish the necessary infrastructure
- Specific targeted measures to promote the right of access and full participation in quality education
- Respect for rights within learning environments¹⁴

According to UNICEF inclusive education is responsive to student-needs and relevant to their life. Therefore, inclusive education is not about teaching the students that can cope with un-responsive educational system. **Inclusive education is the means by which teaching methods, curriculum, staff and pedagogy support and are adapted to the learning of ALL students, including those students who traditional systems have not been able to reach¹⁵.**

The UNICEF approach to Inclusive Education is informed by seven basic principles of human rights: universality and inalienability; indivisibility; interdependence and interrelatedness; equality and non-discrimination; participation and inclusion; empowerment; and accountability and respect for the rule of law.¹⁶

Other important definitions

OECD (2010) defines **diversity** as: ‘characteristics that can affect the specific ways in which developmental potential and learning are realised, including cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and socio-economic differences’¹⁷.

13 DEC/NAEYC. (2009). *Early childhood inclusion: A joint position statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute

14 UNICEF CEE/CIS (2015). Inclusive Education. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/education_18613.html accessed on December 2015

15 UNICEF (2016). Europe and Central Asia Inclusive Education Portal. Retrieved from <http://www.inclusive-education.org/about> Accessed on January 2016.

16 *ibid.*

17 OECD (2010) *Educating Teachers for Diversity. Meeting the Challenge*. Paris: OECD CERI Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/document/38/0,3343,en_2649_35845581_44572006_1_1_1_1,00.html Accessed on January 2016

Working definition of disability: Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities describes persons with disabilities as *‘those who have long-term, physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’*. This working definition of disability **acknowledges the importance of the context and environment in enabling or disabling individuals from participating effectively within society**¹⁸.

1.3. Contextualizing inclusive education in Albania

The Albanian education system and its complexity are a heritage of a series of historic, politics and social developments and events. As in many other states the recent economic, social and cultural realities brought new concerns and challenges and a re – organization of the old ones. Values, traditions, structures, laws, policies and practices that have accompanied the Albanian education system in the past have been continuously questioned as a reaction to these challenges. The right to education for all children even though it is included in the legislation, it seems that it creates a conflict with the rooted practices and structures of the Albanian society.

Education structures and attitudes that have shaped for more than five decades coexist with the new models of inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.

It was necessary for the Albanian education system to keep track with other major changes that happened in all the other fields of the Albanian society. The different developments, the many social, political and economic problems that are present in everyday life influenced the changes in the education system. These changes related to the content, structure and services provided. The education institutions have reflected the changes and created opportunities for education for all children based on their characteristics and capacities. There is a need for a new and modern conceptualization related to the work content, teaching methodology, environment adaptation, and organization and planning of the many educative elements in the process of education, in order for children with disabilities and other vulnerable to fully participate in the school community life as treasured members of it.

Certainly, inclusive practices in education for children with disabilities are a product of the special education development in Albania, that maintained the positive characteristics, embraced the positive experiences of European societies, and impacted by the international experience. Inclusive education

18 UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly*, 24 January 2007, A/RES/61/106, Retrieved from <http://www.refworld.org/docid/45f973632.html> accessed on January 2016

has its own history of development and growth regarding legislation, organization management and the development of curriculum and its content.

The long history of segregation of children with disabilities and other vulnerable children¹⁹ in all levels (institutions and special schools, society) has created barriers for the implementation of inclusive education. In Albanian inclusive education has not been a natural evolution of the previous experiences or a need and necessity. In contrast to other western societies, in which the inclusive education was a product of people with disabilities, their parents and practitioners, in Albania the international influence and imitation have been the main contributing factors in this direction. All the major changes have happened through administrative activities and not as a result of lobbying and pressure coming from people directly or indirectly involved in this process. The inclusive education picture nowadays reflects the aims and realities of its implementation in the Albanian education institutions.

Albania has significantly increased access to all levels of education. Primary and lower secondary enrolment are nearly universal (respectively 99.4% and 95.66%), and between 2009 and 2014, pre - primary net enrolment shot up from 65.66 to 88.56percent. Transition rate to upper secondary education in 99.81%. However, the official drop – out rate in primary and lower secondary education is between 1.3% and 1.7%²⁰. It should be noticed that children from Roma and Egyptian communities still have issues with their school enrolment, so these data don't reflect objectively the situation of drop – out levels. . Major and wide-ranging education reforms have been initiated in recent years, including: curriculum reform; improved teacher training; a more equitable distribution of resources across regions; improved learning conditions; an increase in average teacher salaries; and a revamping of the content and administration of the Matura examination²¹.

Education in Albania is compulsory until the age of 16 years. Approximately 92% of pupils finish basic education and continue their studies in the second level. Teacher – pupil ratio in Albania is relatively high (1:16)²². Data from GoA indicate that the net enrolment ratio in basic education as 86%, and net attendance rate at the level of 90%, while youth literacy rate is reported as 99%²³. However, the 2012 International PISA exam results, do not only rank the performance of Albanian pupils significantly below the average of OECD standards, but they are listed at the ten bottom

19 For instance children from the Roma and Egyptian community have been traditionally discriminated in the previous years in school and society.

20 UNESCO (2015). Albania net enrolment ratio according to level of education. Retrieved from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=127> accessed on January 2016.

21 World Bank (2015). ALBANIA World Bank Group Partnership Program Snapshot April 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/eca/Albania-Snapshot.pdf> accessed on December 2015

22 Ministry of Education and Sports (2015). *Strategy for the Development of Pre – university Education 2014 - 2020*.

23 Ministry of Education and Sports, Statistics Office (2015).

worst performers. A strong correlation is reported to exist between PISA exam results and children's socio-economic background, school autonomy, pupil-teacher ratio, teachers' level of education and available teaching resources²⁴.

Issues in education sector mostly affect the most vulnerable categories of children. As such, according to MoES, the official drop-out rate for Roma children is nearly 4%. Egyptian children's tendency to attend school is slightly higher than that of Roma children, with 3.4% of them dropping-out. About 34.4% of Roma children 7-18 years remained illiterate since they have never attended school; the average years of schooling for Roma children is about 5.5%²⁵. Currently in Albania there are approximately 5000 Roma children between 3 years to 16 years old. The level of school enrolment in the age specified by the law is low; 1 out of 2 Roma children has dropped school. School dropout is even more concerning for Roma girls and for boys and girls of families with low family income, or families facing different social problems²⁶.

Moreover, in relation to children with disability there is a lack of reliable statistics; there are an estimated 120,000 children with some form of disability in Albania. In 2012, ex – Ministry of Education and Science unofficially reports to have 2,123 CWD enrolled in basic education, out of whom, 736 attending special schools. According to ex - MoES, the official drop-out rate for CWD was high, at 7%²⁷.

A variety of practical issues hinder CwD and children from vulnerable groups participation in basic and secondary education, including limited capacity of teachers on disability issues, lack of assistant teachers in situations of overcrowded class rooms, poor infrastructure, lack of proper transportation, discrimination and bullying from older children, school staff and parents of other children. Poor cooperation between professionals of different disciplines and between different sectors of local government, the lack of teaching materials and adjusted school programs for CwD remain as ongoing hurdles for CwD to realize their right to education²⁸.

Even though the principle of inclusive education is widely accepted in education institutions and legislation its implementation faces many barriers. The schools' transformation in an inclusive environment calls for multiplanning activities and it is a process that depends on society's support, curriculum reform, schools organization, teachers' trainings and supportive specialized service provision.

24 OECD (2014). PISA 2012 Results in Focus What 15-year-olds know and what they can do with what they know.

25 Ministry of Education and Sports. Statistics Office

26 Save the Children (2012). *Child rights situation analysis Albania*. Tirana

27 MoES (2011). *0 Drop-Out Action Plan*. Albania

28 Save the Children (2012). *Child rights situation analysis Albania*. Tirana

The lack of a bio – psycho – social model in defining disability

During the last years a process for the evaluation of disability has started with regard to social assistance, with the support of World Bank²⁹. This process included:

- (a) re – writing of the existing criteria for defining and evaluating disability related to social assistance;
- (b) creating a new multidisciplinary process for the evaluation of disability;
- (c) creating the structures of Assessment and Definition of Disability;
- (d) a reform focused on the non – contributive benefits as well on the relevant criteria;
- (e) digitalization of information and communication; and
- (e) development of a new legal framework.

Moreover, GoA is working on the review of the current medical criteria for the assessment of disability and the more detailed description for every medical condition that causes disability on body structures. Additionally, it describes the impact on body functions, everyday activities participation and in environmental barriers in order to ensure uniformity and consistency in the process. The missing diagnoses that cause disability will be added while others that are no more considered as such will be removed. A new document on the Instructions for the Biopsychosocial Assessment of disability will be developed based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health , the official manual of WHO.

1.3.1. Pre – service and in – service teacher’s education

A big responsibility lies in the shoulders of colleges and universities offering teacher education to properly train their pre – service teachers and review of the curriculum they have to offer to their students³⁰. According to the 2010 ETF country report for Albania both pre-service and in-service teachers are not yet ready to respond to diversity in the class. The teacher training curriculum currently lacks emphasis on teacher competences pertinent to the development of inclusive education practices. Student teachers only seem to make contact with their future workplaces during their teaching practices³¹.

29 World Bank is supporting the project “Social Assistance Modernization” since 2014

30 Bustos, R., Lartec, J. De Guzman, A.J., Casiano, C., Carpio, D. and Tongyofen, H.S. (2012). Integration of Inclusive Education Subject in the Curriculum of Pre-service Teachers towards Transformation: Exploring its Impact and Effectiveness. *The Asian Conference on Education 2012 Official Conference Proceedings 2012*

31 ETF (2010). Mapping Policies and Practices for the Preparation of Teachers for Inclusive Education in Contexts of Social and Cultural Diversity: Albania Country Report. Retrieved from [http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E0029DDCE/\\$file/NOTE85SAXQ.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E0029DDCE/$file/NOTE85SAXQ.pdf) accessed on December 2015

Models of initial teacher education for inclusion

Current teacher education programmes have been influenced by a number of pedagogical traditions in past decades, for example academic, practical, technological, personal and critical/social re-constructionist traditions³². Britzman (2003) described practices in institutions holding onto the positivist or academic tradition as providing knowledge through various, often fragmented courses while schools provide the setting where student teachers are expected to apply those theories and integrate knowledge and practice by themselves³³. A number of research studies discuss the effectiveness of different approaches to the preparation of pre-service teachers for inclusion. Stayton and McCollun (2002) identified three models that exist in programmes that train for inclusion: the Infusion model, the Collaborative Training model and the Unification model. In the Infusion model students take 1 or 2 courses that cover inclusive education³⁴. In the Collaborative Training model, many more courses deal with teaching inclusive classes, and mainstream teaching students and special education students do all, or part of their practical experiences together. In the Unification model, all students study the same curriculum that trains them for teaching mainstream education with a focus on pupils with special needs.

In – service teacher education

In – service teacher training is common in Albania as teachers have the obligation to obtain a certain number of credits (training hours) and some of them choose to be trained on inclusive education. However, lately these trainings are not provided anymore because the Institute for Education Development (IED) is revising this activity and trying to find new ways to provide them.

Furthermore, the official compulsory education curriculum demonstrated modest awareness of all groups of people in the country, especially those vulnerable to discrimination and marginalisation. A New Curricula Framework for pre – university education has been approved two years ago; it has been implemented gradually and piloted to the 1st/2nd and 6th/7th grade. According to the ETF study (2010) the new curricula and the relevant training frameworks must be skills and values-oriented, and flexible for the teacher and trainer as well as the student and trainee³⁵. Inclusive education requires

32 Schepens, A., Aelterman, A. and Vlerick, P. (2009) Student Teachers' Professional Identity Formation: Between being Born as a Teacher and becoming one. *Educational Studies*, Vol. 35, Nr 2

33 Britzman, D. P. (2003) *Practice makes practice*. New York: State University of New York Press

34 Stayton, V. D. and McCollun, J. (2002) Unifying general and special education: What does the research tell us? *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 25 (3), 211-218

35 ETF (2010). *Mapping Policies and Practices for the Preparation of Teachers for Inclusive Education in Contexts of Social and Cultural Diversity: Albania Country Report*. Retrieved from [http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E0029DDCE/\\$file/NOTE85SAXQ.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E0029DDCE/$file/NOTE85SAXQ.pdf) accessed on December 2015

a competency-based approach to learning and participation. Schools and education systems should provide guidance by defining key competencies. They can be transformed in personalised learning plans to meet the learning needs of all children³⁶.

1.3.2. Regulatory framework

The current regulatory framework regarding children in Albania is well developed. The law that regulates the pre – university education in Albania is Law Nr. 69 of 2012 “On Pre – university education”³⁷. This Law calls for free and mandatory education and it applies to children aged 6-16 years old. The Albanian legal framework in general warrants the right for a free public education for every child, regardless of his/her needs and special abilities declaring that: “*The inclusion of children with disabilities in special educational institutions is temporarily. The inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools should be a priority*”. Normative clauses of this Law demand that an assistant teacher should be provided by the educational institution for every child with disability and rehabilitative services according to the assessment of their needs. They also require that every teacher that has in his/her classroom a child with special needs should have certified trainings (Article 65, point 3)³⁸. The establishment of a Multidisciplinary Commission that reviews parents’ request and gives recommendations is an added structure in support of inclusion found in this law. Likewise, the Law 10 347, date 4.10.2010, “For the protection of children rights” defines the accountable mechanisms that warrant children’s rights protection with effectiveness as well as specialized care for every child.

In line with the Law nr. 69 are the relevant National Strategies and Action Plans like: the Action Plan for Children (2012-2015) drafted and approved by the ex - Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities (currently the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth) which had as a strategic goal an inclusive and quality education for all children. It called for the inclusion of Roma children in pre - primary education and their smooth transition to first grade. The Plan also called for inclusion and individualized work with children with special needs³⁹.

The new Strategy on Pre – University Education Development 2014 – 2020 aims at improving the quality of education for all and sets inclusive learning as a policy objective. Inclusive learning for this strategy means an approach in which all children learn together in the most near regular school, without

36 UNICEF (2015). Draft ToT Modules on Inclusive Education Introductory Booklet

37 Law Nr. 69 of 2012 “On Pre – university education”

38 Ibid

39 GoA Action Plan for Children (2012-2015). Retrieved from <https://albania.savethechildren.net/sites/albania.savethechildren.net/files/library/Child%20Rights%20Situation%20Analysis%20Albania%5B1%5D.pdf> accessed on January 2016

any racial, gender, ethnic, disability or other discrimination; learning that implies putting children in school and making efforts to organize the appropriate efficient support, according to their individual needs⁴⁰.

International framework

Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits. Normative instruments of the United Nations and UNESCO lay down international legal obligations for the right to education. These instruments promote and develop the right of every person to enjoy access to education of good quality, without discrimination or exclusion. The first international normative instrument on the right to education is the 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE), which, in addition to discrimination, addresses equality of opportunity, access to free primary education and the rights of minority groups⁴¹. Furthermore, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is a cornerstone for the international protection of human rights. The ICESCR is, after the CADE, one of the most comprehensive texts on the right to education, and reiterates CADE's main provisions, especially in its Articles 13 and 14.⁴² Particularly, inclusive education is about putting the right to education into action by including all learners, respecting their diverse needs, abilities and characteristics and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the learning environment⁴³.

In relation to persons with disabilities the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol were adopted on 13 December 2006 and entered into force on 3 May 2008. They came into existence through a forceful call from persons with disabilities around the world to have their human rights respected, protected and fulfilled on an equal basis with others⁴⁴. Albania signed the convention on December 2009 and ratified it on December 2012. This document reaffirms the rights of persons with disabilities presented at the UN Convention on Human Rights and sets new obligations for governments for its implementation. The above mentioned Law nr. 69 of 2012 sanctioning for the first time the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools is in line with Article 24 of the Convention which states:

40 MoES (2015). Strategy for the Pre – University Education Development 2014 – 2020. Albania

41 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002284/228491e.pdf>

42 Ibid

43 UNESCO (2009). Policy Guidelines on inclusion in Education. Paris

44 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2014). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Training Guide, Professional Training Series no.19. Geneva. Retrieved from http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/CRPD_TrainingGuide_PTS19_EN%20Accessible.pdf accessed on December 2015

“States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to:

- a. The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
- b. The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;
- c. Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.”⁴⁵

The European Commission Communication Improving the Quality of Teacher Education (3/08/2007), calls for different policy measures on the level of member states in order to adapt the profession to meet the new challenges of the knowledge-based economy. It states: ‘Changes in education and in society place new demands on the teaching profession. [...] classrooms now contain a more heterogeneous mix of young people from different backgrounds and with different levels of ability and disability. [...] These changes require teachers not only to acquire new knowledge and skills but also to develop them continuously’⁴⁶.

45 UN General Assembly (2007). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 24 January 2007, A/RES/61/106*. Retrieved from: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/45f973632.html> accessed on January 2016

46 Commission of the European Communities (2007) Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education 3/08/2007* Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/com392_en.pdf accessed on January 2016

2. METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the study was to explore and address the underlying causes and gaps for inclusive education in Albania, focusing on pre – service and in – service stages of education and work experience for teachers.

2.1. Research methods

To address the objectives of the study a qualitative methods approach was employed. This approach was well thought-out as more relevant in order to explore the participants' knowledge, attitudes and practices in relation to inclusive education as well as other potential hindering or supporting factors for implementing inclusive education.

Initially, a desk review of the national and international documents relevant to inclusive education was conducted, in order to structure the research instruments and create a clear picture on the current situation in Albania.

The research methods used to gather data for this study were:

- *In-depth interviews*, with representatives from the REA of the four regions
- *Focus Group Discussions* (FGDs) with in – service teachers, emphasizing and exploring the needs of in – service teachers in relation to inclusive education
- *FGDs with university professors*, focusing on their perceptions for their curriculum content and institutional culture in relation to inclusive education
- *Curriculum content review*, to identify if inclusive education and its values are part of the syllabuses and in what level are they included.

2.2. A multi – site study

The target education institutions were four Universities in Albania and the in – service teachers and

REA representatives in the below regions, namely:

- University of Gjirokastra “Eqerem Cabej”, Faculty of Education, Departments of Primary Education and Pre – Primary Education
- University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”, Faculty of Education, Departments of Primary Education and Pre – Primary Education
- University of Durrresi “Aleksander Moisiu”, Faculty of Education, Departments of Primary Education and Pre – Primary Education
- University of Tirana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Departments of Social Work and Social Policy.

2.3. Research sample and sampling criteria

Considering this study was based on a qualitative approach there was no intention to generalize the findings rather than to explore the potential factors that hinder the implementation of inclusive education in Albania. Therefore, a *purposive and convenient sample* was employed based on the participants’ knowledge and experience on the subject. This sampling method was chosen in order for the researchers to obtain the decision – makers’ views, namely the REA representatives. Regarding REA participants they were purposefully chosen to be the experts that their work relates with CWD and experts from the Psychosocial sector within REA. The total number of the participants from this category were 7 as seen in the below table (Table 1).

Interviews	Gjirokastra	Durrresi	Shkodra	Tirana	Total
REA CWD expert	1	1	1	1*	4
REA Psychosocial sector expert	1	1	1		3

In terms of the FGDs the same algorithm was used as in interviews. A purposeful and convenient sample was obtained targeting in – service teachers and university professors. Regarding the in – service teachers efforts were made to include a variety of participants based on: being a rural or urban area school teachers, having qualifications or trainings for inclusive education, school principals, teachers that had CWD in their classes or a diverse classroom that included mostly vulnerable children and assistant teachers (where applicable). As regards to university professors efforts to have a variety of

* In Tirana there was only one person for both positions

them were also made. Accordingly, professors that took part in the FGDs were the ones that taught Teaching methods, Inclusive education or other relevant courses (where applicable), professors that coordinate student's field practice and Heads of the Departments (whom could have a more thorough picture of the curriculum). In some cases, representatives from the Departments of Psychology or Social Work were present because they taught some of the relevant courses in the Education Departments. The number of FGDs participants was 55 teachers and 38 professors resulting in a total number of 93 participants as seen in Table 2. The total number of FGDs conducted was 8, where 4 focus groups were with teachers and other 4 with professors.

Interviews	Gjirokastra	Durresi	Shkodra	Tirana	Total
Teachers	13	11	10	11	55
Professors	12	8	8	10	38

All participants were previously informed on the study and its aim as well as their rights and had given their oral consent for their participation on the study. An experience note - keeper facilitated the interviews and FGDs and, whenever the participants accepted, a recorder was used.

2.4. Data Collection

Primary data of this study have been collected through the use of different instruments developed by the research team, approved by UNICEF Albania and field tested before formal data gathering commenced. These included:

- Semi structured interviews with REA representatives
- FGD guide for in - service teachers
- FGD guide for professors

2.5. Data analysis

A thematic data analysis approach was used for data analysis. Major and minor themes have been coded during multiple readings, examining interconnections and relationship. The data analyses summary underwent an independent, secondary review, after which research team resolved minor discrepancies during research group meetings. The final topics resulted are presented at the next section.

3. IN – SERVICE TEACHING EXPERIENCE - FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Teachers' knowledge on inclusive education

Teachers' perceptions and knowledge on inclusive education varied significantly across the sites of the study and the nature of their qualifications. The majority of them didn't have any knowledge from their studies education on inclusive education, besides teachers that had finished their university studies in recent years. There were teachers - even in Tirana the capital of Albania - that reported that they didn't have a clear picture on inclusive education. On the other hand, a **major part of them used inclusive education interchangeably with inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education institutions**. Traditionally, inclusive education was related to this concept; yet nowadays, it has a much more wide approach and it relates to all children, as mentioned in the relevant definitions of inclusion.

Notwithstanding the above, there were also many teachers that described inclusive education in a precise way. For example, a teacher in urban Durres area defined it as inclusion of all children in school without any gender, religious, racial, appearance or other discrimination and as an equal treatment of all children. In line with this, another teacher described inclusive education as related to access and participation in schools, but she focused more on disability rather than all children:

“Pupils should all be treated in the same way, without differentiating them based on their difficulties, they should take part in every school activity, feel equal with their peers and to have the right to be enrolled in school not taking into consideration their disability”

Teacher, Urban area, Gjirokaster

They also give voice to the role of the teacher in order for inclusion to be reached and they mention the fact that children's main teacher or an assistant teacher should be very supportive for the child to feel included by the teacher and other pupils.

REA representatives described a more clear picture in relation to inclusive learning environment. Their considerable experience and the fact that inclusion is part of their everyday work enable them to

have these perceptions on inclusive education. As one of the participants from REA reported: “Inclusion has different perspectives, we have inclusion for children in street situation, for Roma and Egyptian community, for children with special needs in regular schools and not in special education. This is my understanding for inclusion; children should be treated through an individualized work for them to go toward inclusion, to stay in inclusive learning environments”

When it comes to multidisciplinary treatment of children with disabilities in school teachers usually refer to supporting them with every means in order for them to participate in every school/out of school activity. For instance, a teacher in Tirana urban area indicates:

“According to the normative dispositions these children present to a multidisciplinary commission in REA and it is the commission that decides if the child can integrate in a regular school. Afterwards, the child should come to school with all the instructions and a detailed plan, which is the basis for the IEP development” Teacher, urban area, Tirana

This approach highlights the multidisciplinary understanding, which refers to the role of the different within school structures as well as at REA level. The School Committee and the Multidisciplinary Committee of REA are crucial for this approach towards children with disability. The representatives of REA are also informed on these processes and they report that both Committees are established because it is a law obligation. Their functioning is not yet optimal because they face problems with the paediatricians that are members of the committees (at REA level), which is a problem to be addressed by the in line Ministries.

3.1.1 Sources of information on inclusive education

The higher education curriculum on Education in the early ‘90s and before had little if any information on children with developmental disorders or disabilities, let alone for inclusion. Thus, the majority of teachers that had graduated during this period didn’t receive any formal course or information neither on children with disabilities nor on inclusive education for all children which is a latest approach.

“In our studies we didn’t have any information, I have finished studies in 1996 and at that time this information was not given, we had no idea on this issue. I have studied biochemistry and at that time we didn’t even have a course on psychology, which is minimal; our generation didn’t have this topic as a course, teachers that continued a Master in recent years are probably more informed” School manager, rural area, Durres

However, for teachers that have graduated during the last decade or even earlier the situation is partially more favourable. Inclusive education was part of their studies for some of them, either at

the Bachelor level or at the Master's level. Teachers themselves felt that they needed more specific information on inclusive education and specifically on the different methods to work particularly with children with different abilities. Inclusion of other vulnerable groups of children that can potentially be at risk of exclusion was reported as an easier task for teachers. In terms of inclusive education:

"We have finished the Master studies and we have received information for disorders in general, but we haven't received information for groups of disorders in a specific way..... for me the major difficulty with inclusion are children with disabilities, I can manage all the other vulnerable children" Teacher, urban area Shkoder.

Forlin (2001) argues that beliefs influence pre – service teacher attitudes to inclusive education that in turn, influence their intentions and behaviours. If attitudes can be formed by the quality of pre-service provision, then it seems reasonable to conclude that the school-based placement experience may be a key time when attitudes towards inclusion may be influenced⁴⁷.

It is worth mentioning that a considerable part of the participants have received information on inclusive education through trainings provided by national organizations and NGOs⁴⁸. However, these initiatives were focused only CwD rather than inclusive education for all children. A small part of the teachers did identify other groups of children as part of the inclusive education approach, even the trained ones. These teachers' knowledge, attitudes and resulting practices seemed to be more appropriate and positive compared to the teachers that didn't have any information or the one that they had was merely sporadic.

"I have been part of trainings related to autism, learning disorders, IEP etc. we have been a project school and we have been included in these trainings; for example we learned about other pupils and their reaction towards children with disabilities, how to they behave and I can see with pleasure that 70% to 80% of other pupils react positively" Teacher, rural area, Durres

On the other hand, FGDs and interviews revealed the differences between the teachers that participated in trainings or had received other qualifications (like Master studies) relevant to inclusive education and the ones that didn't have this opportunity.

"NGOs, the Ministry and some school managers have been supporting us a lot. The difference is obvious in schools that have been part of NGO projects for inclusion and

47 Forlin, C. (2001). Inclusion: Identifying potential stressors for regular class teachers. *Educational Research*, 43(3)

48 Some of the participants have been purposefully selected because they worked in schools where it was known from the REA that NGOs like Save the Children, Council of Europe or World Vision had conducted trainings on inclusive education, Individual Education Plans etc.

those that haven't had any training, their level and culture is very different and this is also obvious among urban and rural schools; the latter usually don't have psychosocial experts" REA representative

Their need for information and methods of working with different children was evident, and they emphasized that working with specific groups of children with disabilities was a major priority for them. In all the sites of the study, a major part of the teachers have not been part of these pilot project schools and this had impacted negatively the way they worked with children.

It was important for the research to include teachers that had children with disabilities in their classrooms or children belonging to a vulnerable group, like children from the Roma and Egyptian community, children coming from families with low socio – economic background etc. Therefore, teachers in many cases had at least one experience in working with children with disabilities and in others have had many children from vulnerable groups. They report that when they were in this situation and had no information at all, it was their individual efforts that helped them work with children with disabilities or approach and include in their way children from vulnerable groups. It is important to mention that no cluster, professional trainings or even peer to peer training among teachers wasn't implemented. For example, a teacher reports:

"When I first started working half of my class were from the Roma and Egyptian community and I needed to adapt a lot my teaching style in order for them to feel included, yet still there are many challenges" Teacher, urban area, Shkoder

This was the case for other participants as well. They were motivated to be more informed on specific problems when they were obliged to do so. Nevertheless, they didn't consider it a challenge to be more aware on other children's needs and methods to work with them; rather they emphasized the most the challenges faced with CwD.

"From 1 to 10 I would say I reach at 4...I have information because every year in every parallel class there were children with special needs" Teacher, urban area, Shkoder

The few assistant teachers appointed this year in selected schools face similar problems, they have not any university degree neither are qualified to work with children with disabilities. A teacher reported that she feels she needs to have more training on the ways how to work with these children in class. An extra care is needed here to fill the gaps not only for urban school teachers, but also for the rural ones. They frequently lack the support of other professionals, like the psychologist or social workers, which are more present at the urban schools, so this adds to their challenges in relation to inclusion.

"We are not doing well with the assistant teachers, because we face problems with human resources, for their payments, they are beyond the curricula framework. And in

the absence of an assistant teacher the large number of pupils in a class is an even bigger problem” REA representative

3.1.2 Individual Education Plans (IEP)

Teachers’ experiences in developing an IEP varied. Teachers that have had at least one time a child with disability in their class had the chance to work and compile the IEP. Others reported that they had never developed an IEP. Of the teachers that had developed at least one time an IEP the majority of them indicated that they faced difficulties to develop the objectives and refresh them whenever needed or whenever they saw a progress/regress in the pupil.

“Teachers have been trained in developing a plan, they have had a chance to see it but to a point....they don’t know e.g. which is the level of an autistic child in the 3rd or 4th grade, they should be qualified in these specifics also or they need an assistant teacher” Teacher, rural area, Tirana

It is worth mentioning that teachers that had the chance to work with IEP more than once and have been trained or instructed to develop them didn’t face many challenges. They have been familiarized with them. School psychologists and experts from the REA or commissions of school or REA were the main sources of assistance for them, in order to develop the plans. Below is the experience of an assistant teacher in Gjirokaster:

“Some teachers have developed an IEP. The Commission has set the objectives for 3 months. It wasn’t difficult; we have set the objectives keeping in mind the pupil and in collaboration with teachers and the psychologist. We have set the objectives and review them every 3 months, it wasn’t that difficult and we had the collaboration of math and literacy teachers” Assistant teacher, urban school, Gjirokaster

Others describe the help that they received from social workers or psychologists in developing an IEP and their challenges where they didn’t had one. Parents were not mentioned at this point; the normative dispositions demand a collaboration between mainstream teacher, assistant teacher and parents. The IEP should be developed in collaboration with parents.

“I have developed the plan and have gained from the experience of the social worker that the parents had employed on their own cost...she has been a great help” Teacher, rural area, Durres

“....at schools where there are no psychologists or social workers we face many difficulties in developing an IEP, psychologists do not exist at village schools and that is why there it

is impossible to develop IEP plans” Teacher, rural area, Shkoder

Nevertheless, the majority of the teachers – participants either didn’t have any experience and information in relation to the IEP or even if they had information this was mainly theoretical and lacked the hands on experience on developing and working with IEPs. In contract, REA representatives reported that they have trained teachers to develop an IEP, but they don’t have the chance yet to monitor the situation. When they monitored some IEPs they have found irregularities and misperceptions, which can probably be addressed though other trainings or information sessions. Besides that, it seems that teachers have many bureaucracies in their every day work and working with IEPs is seen as extra file to fill for them. There are teachers that can work very well with children, but don’t have the time to reflect their work on papers.

“Teachers have too many work to do every day, we face a variety of problems, sometimes we are threatened that we are going to lose our job. What about us? Don’t we have rights?” Teacher, urban area, Tirana

Their major challenges were with children with disabilities like autism or ADHD rather than physical disabilities. Children with physical disabilities should have an IEP in gym class, whereas for the other teachers they were manageable. However, in practice some of the physical disabilities were also perceived as a challenge and teachers thought that their education could be better on special education institutions were they have all the relevant didactic material, like the Braille alphabet/code.

“For example, a blind child should go to a special education institution because there he/she can have all the appropriate settings, the didactic materials, texts written in Braille... our schools don’t offer this service” Teacher, urban area Gjirokaster

Some type of informal learning between teachers was created in order to share experiences in relation to working with children with disabilities, more experienced teachers assisted the less experiences or the ones that had never had worked before with this new method. The same rationale was for teachers that had been trained; they have been a source of information and experience. These can be good practices that can be further supported by education institutions and result in formal networking of teachers. Furthermore, the central government and REA can promote e more systemic approach for informing teacher, enabling them to have hands on experience and for sharing experiences.

3.1.3 The role of the assistant teacher

Starting from last year in some regions assistant teachers were appointed in schools after their request. During this year this change was a little more evident, but still it is in its beginnings. The Law

nr. 69 of 2012 has sanctioned the appointment of assistant teachers, but in practice there are many challenges. The major challenges in this direction related to the lack of a specialized higher education institution that can prepare assistant teachers in Albania, the way assistant teachers are perceived by the principal teacher, the current lack of qualified assistant teachers and the institutional regulations that should be in place in order for the assistant teachers to be included in the total number of teachers and have their teaching norms.

“In other cities the assistant teachers are mainstream teachers at risk of losing their jobs due to the low number of hours they have. But in Tirana we think it is better without anything than with a non – expert, a child with problems cannot be integrated. If we had assistant teachers the problems would be solvable and we would talk for real about inclusion” Psychosocial expert, Tirana

The lack of the profession of assistant teacher was mentioned many times in FGDs and during interviews with REA representatives.

“As far as I now today there is no single school, department or higher education institution in Albania that prepare teachers for this profile, we have asked that the assistant teachers at least should have some trainings in this field and we had the chance to have a psychologist that was well – trained by Save the Children and had a master in School Psychology. This was one assistant teacher appointed this year, while the two others didn’t have any training or other relevant qualifications, so in that case we have chosen teachers with considerable experience and trained” REA representative

On the other side, the current assistant teachers faced educational and emotional challenges when asked to work for the first time with children with special needs. For some of them the lack of qualifications impacted their quality of work as well as their emotional wellbeing. Their human values motivated them and made them to have more empathy for the child they were assisting; for others it was their need to have a job, even if it wasn’t the one for which they were qualified.

“At the beginning it was very difficult for me because I didn’t know how to behave, I was a young mother myself and it was the first time that I had to work with children with special needs and it was shocking. But, every day that I work with him and when he reads loud enough in class, it’s like my own daughter reads. At the beginning it was difficult emotionally but formally also: I had to be OK with the documentations, it was my duty and I wanted to do it well; however it would be easier if I was trained on this topics. I have a master’s degree in my discipline. But, if I am appointed again as an assistant teacher then I will seriously consider to have trainings even privately, at my own expense” Assistant teacher, Durres

In terms of (mis) perceptions on the role of the assistant teachers from the FGDs it resulted that they were partially true. Many mainstream teachers have reported their need for an assistant teacher referring to a caregiver rather than a teacher. Some of them confused the role of the assistant teacher with the role of a caregiver. Currently, some of the teachers were obliged to fulfil even basic hygiene needs for some children in their classes and this has frustrated them. It seems that this situation has created the perception that the assistant teacher will be there to do the same. In fact, the law sanctions that the assistant teacher is responsible for the educational, social and emotional wellbeing of children. A teacher from Durres describes that:

“We are teachers of primary education, the trainings are necessary for the assistant teachers, but currently the assistant teacher doesn’t know where he or she is going to be appointed every year. That is why we have a problem here, between the main teacher and the assistant teacher, who is going to do what: the main teacher treats the assistant teacher as an assistant but not teacher. He could say: go with this child to the bathroom, clean him etc. He/she doesn’t understand that the assistant teacher has the same responsibilities and duties as him/herself” Teacher, urban area, Durres

The current lack of qualified assistant teachers was a challenge for REA because they didn’t have experts to appoint as assistant teachers. Some of them resolved this issue temporarily and put more qualified teachers or teachers with more trainings in inclusive education to these positions (as mentioned earlier in Durres and Gjirokastra this was the route they had chosen), but others preferred not to have at all any assistant teacher and make no compromises.

Finally, an added challenge is the lack of the number of assistant teachers in education staff per each REA, which in a way leaves little space for filling all the needs for them in all schools and for every child. For example, in Tirana the total number of formally diagnosed children with disabilities was almost 700 and there was no assistant teacher appointed for this year. In other areas, they operated in a different way: they had appointed teachers that didn’t fulfil the total teaching norm as assistant teachers. This can only be considered a short term solution, as it hampered them from adding assistant teachers on their list of teachers and relevant budget. That is why this solution didn’t created the opportunity to have as much teachers as needed, but only as much as the “difference” in teaching hours allowed (mainly they were 2-3 teachers in regions were much more were needed).

“We have 33 children with health report and others that are being assessed and documented. And we only have 3 assistant teachers for the moment” REA representative

Despite the challenges there was no single participant that didn’t recognize the importance of assistant teachers for practicing inclusive practices. In practice, assistant teachers don’t even have

appropriate spaces, like a resource class where they can go with pupils when necessary or appropriate didactic materials. During interviews and FGDs the role of the assistant teacher was limited and related only to CwD. However, an assistant teacher can also be helpful to the inclusion of all children in mainstream schools.

3.1.4 Knowledge on education policies and legislation

Information on education policies and relevant laws as well as procedures that should be followed was rather sporadic than systemic and thorough. REA representatives and school managers were better informed than teachers. It was interesting how during the FGDs some of the teachers learned about procedures for which they were not informed before, either by other teachers or by REA representatives. However, it wasn't clear if it was their lack motivation for more information or the lack of regular procedures for sharing information or both.

“The new curricula has inclusion concepts, one of the curricula’s principles is inclusion, how to understand it. Considering the law allows me that children with disabilities should be part of my class because e.g. their house is near, it means that the law has allowed the parents to send their children wherever they like. So, inclusion is part of the curricula, the establishment of the multidisciplinary commission is part of the law”. School manager, rural area Durres

It is obvious that teachers report their knowledge on inclusive education legislation and policies focusing once more on CwD rather than all children or at least children from other vulnerable groups.

On the other hand, some of the participants indicated the gaps in the law and the normative clauses, like the pupil's mandatory percentage of attendance, the many cases of children that have a certain disability and parents deny it, their assessment with grades etc.

“There are many problems in the normative clauses, they should be reviewed. For example, the level of attendance is not clear. Principals say it should be approximately 40 – 50% without having a basis for that. In relation to the development of the IEP if you don't see a student because it doesn't attend you cannot develop the right objectives in the IEP and cannot assess the progress. The law only states that these children cannot fail the class but nothing in specific for these issues, neither for the cases of parents that don't accept their children disabilities and we cannot work with IEP with them nor ask for assistant teacher legally” REA representative

3.2. Teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education: a favouring or hindering factor?

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion can be of crucial importance when it comes to its implementation in practice. Attitudes relate to the culture of inclusion. Teachers' positive attitudes can lead to an accepting culture whereas negative attitudes can hinder inclusion implementation, even in the best possible settings. Teachers – participants of this study had very different attitudes towards inclusion, varying from highly positive – teachers believed that inclusion has very good effects for all children and community in general – to very negative, where teachers believed that inclusion only worsened the situation for teachers, other children and their parents. It should be noted that if the negative attitudes of pre-service teachers are not addressed during initial teacher education, they may continue to hamper the progress of inclusive education efforts in schools⁴⁹.

In this continuum, there were many teachers and REA representatives that believed in inclusive education, but with some criteria and limits in certain situations. As a teacher describes below children from Roma and Egyptian community face challenges in attending school and have not very collaborative parents.

“I am in favour of inclusion for the moment, I have had many different pupils and that is why I say I am in favour, but we need to work a lot with parents, if they don't accept it then our work equals nothing. At the beginning when I took the first grade and saw that many Roma children I cried. Then I said to myself ‘what about these children that come to school with slippers don't they have the right to be educated?’ They came to school hungry, from families with no education culture nor intellectual abilities, and I was thinking that I am paid for this job why shouldn't I give them this opportunity? It is the same for children with special needs maybe they also have parents that cannot help them and I can, that is why I try to do that in my class” Teacher, rural area, Shkoder

However, individual motivation and positive attitudes towards inclusion is not always achievable amongst teachers in Albania. Teachers reported that even though they have had much training in relation to the inclusion of Roma and Egyptian children they still hold negative attitudes towards them and their inclusion, indicating that segregation would be a better solution. Factors contributing to these attitudes could be only individual, but also social.

The OECD TALIS survey (2009) also found that teachers do not feel fully prepared to cope with

49 Bustos, R., Lartec, J. De Guzman, A.J., Casiano, C., Carpio, D. and Tongyofen, H.S. (2012). Integration of Inclusive Education Subject in the Curriculum of Pre-service Teachers towards Transformation: Exploring its Impact and Effectiveness. *The Asian Conference on Education 2012 Official Conference Proceedings 2012*

the challenges of students with special educational needs. With this in mind, what should be included in mainstream teacher education for inclusion?⁵⁰ For the education system in Albania it is an urgent necessity to monitor teachers at risk of burnout or of demonstrating negative behaviours to other children and parents of them.

In terms of staff motivation the REA states that has made efforts to at least train teachers when possible, but there are no other means of motivation (e.g. financial). This lack of motivation schemes in state institutions can contribute to the development of non – favouring attitudes for inclusive education.

“What kind motivation can we provide to the staff and teachers? Trainings are not provided by us [REA], we gather their requests and try to fill some needs, but they are not always integrated in a systemic approach; we depend a lot on NGOs and their projects. For example, last year we have had many requests for trainings on children with disabilities but not related to inclusion” REA representative

At the middle of these positive – negative attitudes was a majority of teachers, whom believe that inclusion can be achieved and has a positive impact for everyone, but they were concerned for the Albanian context of inclusion and for some extreme cases of children. In terms of the Albanian context of inclusion all teachers agree that the Law on inclusion of all children is very well written in letter, but it is not implemented and that is why they face enormous difficulties in practice.

“We say we are in favour of inclusion we have the legislation and ideally we would have an assistant teacher, but for the moment we don’t, but we forget all the other conditions: the classes are overcrowded, we don’t even have enough chairs for the students to sit let alone for the assistant teachers, and so many other things” Teacher, rural area, Tirana

Positive personal experiences with children with different backgrounds and needs are one of the best predictors of shaping positive attitudes for teachers as seen in the below case:

“We are in favour of inclusion, I have had many children from poor families that were outstanding pupils, but didn’t have the materials to fulfil all their school obligations, however I was very tolerant with them ” Teacher, urban area, Shkoder

Teachers, psychosocial experts and REA representatives suggest that for the Albanian context and conditions it would be a better choice not to include all children in regular schools. Some extreme cases of them that need a caregiver, besides an assistant teacher, recommend to be put in special education institutions until they make some kind of progress. They mainly mention cases of children that are not

50 OECD (2009) *Creating effective teaching and learning environments – first results from TALIS* Retrieved from: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/17/51/43023606.pdf> Accessed on January 2016

able to care for their hygiene (e.g. they urinate in class or take their clothes off) or others that have aggressive behaviour towards other children or teachers.

“Inclusion can be reached, I am in favour, but not every child should be included in school, it should depend on the level of the problem or disability that he/she has and from the difficulties. I think that children that have deep problems should not be included as they disturb and disorganize the whole class so it depends from the problem and its level, even in the presence of the assistant teacher” Teacher, urban area, Durres

Psychosocial experts also suggest having something like an “acceptance threshold”:

“I think that not all children should be accepted and it should not only be a decision for the parent to make. We even had a child exposing his sexual organs in the middle of the class and there was no assistant teacher there whatsoever. We have discussed it many times that we should put an acceptance threshold for inclusion in schools” Psychosocial expert, Tirana

Teachers with very diverse classrooms describe the positive effects of inclusion in every child and even the teacher herself. One of the most important challenges is dealing with parents in denial of their child disability or with parents that don’t care about their children education, like explained below:

“The thing is that we all should accept inclusion here, the teacher should accept it and the teacher should discuss and persuade the parent for this, then we can say that we have won. Three years ago I had a class with many Roma children, a child with autism and two children with hyperactivity, the other children were “white”; I have ended up crying at the principal’s office in the 3rd day, it was very difficult for me, parents didn’t accept them (Roma children) and wanted to take their children to other schools, so I had to convince them initially. But I have managed it” Teacher, rural area, Shkoder

In conclusion, it can be stated that even though teachers didn’t accept the concept of inclusion at the beginning nowadays they speak using the right language and based on their own experience. They only lack more detailed trainings focusing on the modern approach of inclusive education⁵¹, because their attitudes are changing.

3.2.1 Beliefs on the impact of inclusive education on vulnerable and other children

In line with the above statements and attitudes were the beliefs of teachers on the impact of inclusive education to other children as well as to vulnerable children. In general, their beliefs were positive on

51 As per the definitions it related to education for all children and not only CwD

the impact of inclusive education, besides some sporadic negative reactions towards it. They were able to recall different cases of positive changes in children's behaviour. These children are being educated with the value of solidarity and collaboration, they learn that not all children are the same and in life we all face problems. An education institution mission does not relate only to academic progress, but to promoting human values; inclusion has enormous effects on the latter.

"It learns children human emotions, it learns them to care for people in need, to show respect and pupils generally help these children [it refers to children with disabilities]"

Teacher, urban area, Durres

Inclusive values are concerned with issues of equality, rights, participation, learning, community, respect for diversity, trust and sustainability, compassion, honesty, courage and joy. Seeing values as 'fundamental guides and prompts to moral action', Booth and Dyssegaard state that in education, an understanding of the values which give rise to our actions is essential if we are to 'do the right thing'⁵².

Very positive were the beliefs in terms of the effects of inclusion on vulnerable children in general and children with disabilities in particular. Teachers have seen children that were previously placed in special education institutions having progress in their classes and they have also experienced the opposite. In one case, a child that had made some progress in a regular school was put in a special education school by his parents and then again to the regular school. The teacher said that when he came back his behaviour was far worse than when it came there for the first time.

"Our problem is not the children but parents, particularly when they don't accept that their child has a problem, anyway I believe that the child has made progress, he is not that aggressive as he was before, when he was in the kindergarten he destroyed all the toys while now he can stay for an hour teaching without moving, but he doesn't like the collaboration or caring from the other pupils [she refers to a child with autism]. The first step is integration and then inclusion" Teacher, urban area Gjirokaster

Children from the Roma and Egyptian community are also included in regular schools only during the last years due to efforts from many state institutions and NGOs. They are related too to the inclusion process and relevant strategies and action plans. However, the situation with these children appeared a little different. They have difficulties in fulfilling their basic needs, teachers say that they sometimes don't come to school for a long period of time because their parents don't have the means to feed them let alone sending them to school. According to a teacher in a rural school in Shkoder:

"Working with Roma children is different, they don't want to be included, e.g. they didn't

52 Booth, T. and Dyssegaard, B. (2008) *Quality is not enough, the contribution of inclusive values to the development of Education for All*, Copenhagen, Danida

recite in the alphabet festive event⁵³ even though they had learned the poems very well, when the moment came they didn't wanted to take part because they felt embarrassed. They felt prejudiced but with no reason, they feel they are different and this makes them to withdraw" Teacher, rural area, Shkoder

On the other hand the majority of the teachers reported that if you try a little harder you can include Roma and Egyptian children far more than other children. They are described as active children, with advanced math abilities due to their way of living and very good in gymnastics. The role of the teacher is considered important in integration and inclusion for these children.

3.2.2. Teachers' experiences with parents' community in the process of inclusion

Teachers believe that the parents of children with disabilities or vulnerable children in general are very satisfied with the new approach for their children, inclusion. In many cases, parents are informed on their rights and their children's rights, yet in other they have limited information.

"Parents of children with disabilities are very collaborative and in general grateful for our efforts. We feel that they are present in general, they react fast when we need them" Teacher, rural area, Gjirokaster.

"Parents of children with disabilities are the most collaborative. Fortunately, lately they have become more aware on their rights. However, we face some problems with them also, e.g. recently we appointed an assistant teacher for a child and the parents of other children with disability reacted and asked for their children to have assistant teachers also. Then there are some cases of parents that privately employed and assistant teacher for their children during school, but this is very expensive for them" REA representative.

From the teachers' perspective parents of other children generally hold negative attitudes towards inclusion. The main reason for that is their concern that their own children are being out of the teacher's attention and this can influence their academic results. Teachers also report some cases of parents that reacted negatively and complained that they would take their children to other schools. These cases were not very frequent but they are evident even in Tirana. In line with this a teacher described her experience with parents:

"Parents have complained and an uncomfortable and unpleasant situation was created, they thought that their children had a decline in their results, but I don't think they did."

⁵³ It is a tradition in Albania for every first grade to organize an event called "alphabet event" where all children are appointed a letter and recite a poem.

There are moments when X [name of the child deleted for ethical reasons] screams but I have told all children not to react when she does so and that we are going to make X to behave as we do. Yet, I had complaints.” Teacher, urban area, Tirana

Schools in suburban or rural areas in some cases face problems with the low total number of children enrolled; these challenges put more pressure to teachers and school managers towards parents of other children. They are obliged to accept all children enrolled in their schools, but on the other hand parents threaten that they will move their children to other schools due to the presence of children with disabilities and particularly of children coming from vulnerable groups, like from Roma and Egyptian community or from low socio – economic background. This was the case for rural areas but also for some schools in Tirana.

“We have a decline in the total number of pupils during the last 3 years and the reason is the high number of Roma children that we have in our school. Parents of these children that try to enrol them in other schools nearby tell us that they are denied this right. The school representatives even say to them: ‘go and enrol your child to _____ school [name of the school deleted for ethical reasons], this is the right school for your child!’” School manager, urban area, Tirana

There were similar examples in other sites of the study, e.g. in Shkodra in one school with more Roma children the teacher explained that parents community are informed that in that school they are many Roma children and don’t prefer to send their children there.

Nonetheless, there is a community of parents that are more accepting of others and tend not to discriminate children. Teachers have described also some positive experiences with parents of other children.

“I didn’t face any problem with parents; I remember one time a parent came and saw his child sitting in the bank with a Roma child and he left....I have asked him later if he had a problem with that and explained to him that the reason I did it is because his child was good with the results and wanted to help the other child. I never had any problem again” Teacher, urban area, Durres

Inclusion requires commitment from a range of stakeholders including government, teacher training institutions, schools, teachers, and the school community if it is to be successful. As we move towards an inclusive future, it is teacher training institutions that will become pivotal in ensuring that teachers have the appropriate attitudes and skills to further this agenda⁵⁴.

54 Sharma, U., Forlin, C., & Loreman, T. (2008). Impact of training on pre-service teachers’ attitudes and concerns about inclusive education and sentiments about persons with disabilities. *Disability and Society*, 23(7), 773- 774

3.3. Practices and challenges for the implementation of inclusive education

What's more important than knowledge and attitudes regarding inclusive education are putting them in practice, to have an optimal implementation. In terms of every day practice in an effort to create inclusive learning environment teachers, psychosocial experts and REA representatives stated that there are still many challenges. Ensuring access, participation and supports of all children was described as not satisfying by the majority of the teachers and other participants.

"We need more experts, we need the didactic materials and parents awareness"
Psychosocial expert, Gjirokastra

Access of children in schools is hampered by their lack possibility to enrol in the most suitable school for them. Even though schools do not have the right to deny access, in fact, they tend to use arguments like being overcrowded for them not to accept vulnerable children. Besides that, when at school children with disabilities cannot be part of all activities due to the lack of supports. Assistant teachers appointed in schools this year are very few, if any, and even when they are present they don't have a resource class to work with children with different abilities. The school infrastructure continues to be a major block for access and participation of children with physical disabilities. Particularly children with visual impairments don't have didactic materials appropriate for them as well as children with hearing impairments. Overcrowded classes with more than 30 pupils challenging on their own for class management, let alone with children that needs extra attention and without an assistant teacher. These are only few of the challenges with which teachers have to cope in creating an inclusive learning environment. Needless to say that teachers don't really know how to work with these children as well as with children belonging to vulnerable groups due to their lack of qualifications in this field.

"Children are accepted and we have assistant teacher, but we have an issue with the resource classes, we have also blind children and no didactic materials for them" Assistant teacher, urban area, Gjirokaster

In this context teachers have used some methods to create a more inclusive learning environment and conduct a differentiated work with different children. Below are few of them:

"We don't take absences for these children, we dictate them separately, we sit them with classmates that can help them, we reduce the number of homework for them, we have assessed them positively frequently, e.g. either we say it to them or draw a flower or a bird in their hand, whatever they like in order to be encouraged" School manager, urban area, Shkoder

Engaging all children to care and support vulnerable children is another approach in developing human values to all children.

“All pupils are included with rotation, I move them on their seats and every day a different child is appointed to support a vulnerable child, in order for everyone to take responsibility. Even the worst behaving children don’t object when it’s their responsibility to take care or help other children” School manager, rural area, Durres

The role of the parents is imperative for the establishment of an inclusive learning environment. Participants’ experiences with parents were twofold, collaborative and non – collaborative. In this regard, teachers and REA representatives point out some successful cases of children and parents. In these cases the collaboration between all the relevant links led to progress of the child and to changing the culture of other children, parents and school culture in general. On the other hand, they also point out many parents that are in denial or negligent and don’t accept their children’s abilities. In practice, this is one of the key challenges for teachers because they can’t even ask for an assistant teacher or work with an IEP or ask for other facilitations like to reduce the number of children in their class.

“I feel that I need to be trained, I have one case of a girl that has problems and her parents deny it. I have been trying to help her, but with her I still work with the pre – primary education texts, and when I ask parents to finish a homework with her, they say “Ok” and then they come tomorrow without nothing” Teacher, rural area, Durres

Some teachers felt overwhelmed by this unpleasant situation created with parents. They think that parents are actually breaking their children’s rights to a quality education by denying their condition and impede their potential progress.

“I have 35 years experience in teaching and after all this years I don’t understand why the legislation don’t solve this problem of parents that don’t accept their children’s problems and we have to deal with this situation” Teacher, urban area, Gjirokaster

In line with the above are the opinions and experiences of psychosocial experts in schools which also demand to address this issue that can be related to child protection. Parents harm their children even more by denying it. Measures should be taken from policy makers and state institutions to address this issue as soon as possible.

“We had cases when the Committee gathered to assess a child, but the bottom line is that the parent is the one that decides, and if he or she doesn’t accept the recommendations then we cannot do anything about it. It is crucial to resolve this issue for everyone”
Psychosocial expert, Tirana

As argued in earlier sections teachers report that their trainings and studies should provide a balance based on learning through practice and theory. They report that it is necessary to move beyond a reflective practice and to actively learn through concrete cases in order to

improve their work practice. Teachers need to learn for inclusive education but on the other side, they also need to observe how theories are put in practice ideally with the support of their colleagues or other professionals.

3.3.1 Implementation of the law on inclusion

The law on inclusive education is partially implemented by education institutions in Albania. REA is one of the institutions that engages in implementing the Law; being a relatively new way of functioning they have faced some challenges, stated below:

“In our school we had a girl with different abilities and one day that I had taught in her class I gave her a 10 [the highest grade in Albania], next to that wherever she saw me she came and kissed me and hug me. The parent came one day and asked for me to thank me. But teachers are not trained of informed, they are afraid e.g. that if they assess a child with disability with a good grade at a possible control from the state they would judge it as a wrongdoing. They are not sure about it” School manager, rural area, Shkoder

Mixing children in organizing group activities or giving them responsibilities alongside with other children has been another frequently mentioned technique. It is proved to be effective because it creates positive attitudes and emotions and enhances the group identity for all children.

“I have appointed the pupil in different groups for easy tasks, e.g. to hand out the markers and motivate her for doing so. Children are very accepting and she feels better. She has been previously to special education institution and had gained some of the behaviours of other children there, but I can see the progress today.” School manager, urban area, Durres

3.3.2. Discourse on diversity

The changing dynamics of nowadays classrooms bring a need to discuss even more for issues related to diversity and this has happened in Albania in recent years. Teachers and REA representatives share experiences and raise their voices for the needed changes and for dynamics of their classes and schools.

“Teachers talk a lot about diversity and share many experiences, but mainly informally. I have asked many times for the help of my colleagues and found it very positive experience to discuss with them” Teacher, urban area, Shkoder.

“Overall we have an institutional inclusive practice, it can be found on everyday

communication, in our annual and monthly plan, our internal policy and activities” REA representative

3.3.3. The role of central government and REA

According to the participants REA has been very supportive during the last two years, but their competencies and budgets are also limited, which is stated by REA representatives also:

“REA has always responded to our quests, in cases we had a child with a health report. In other cases, when we were not sure we have asked the expert in REA and things were solved, pupils were enrolled and school managers didn’t express any problems” Teacher, urban area, Shkoder

On the other hand, some teachers also expressed their complaints in relation to the information they have received by REA for the new procedures on children’s multidisciplinary assessment, for the IEP development or for their lack of support in collaborating with parents. In the majority of the cases the multidisciplinary Committee of REA functions on a regular basis and makes assessments as well as gives recommendations for the children with a health report. However, this Committee has only the right to give recommendations and parents are the ones that make the final decision on putting their children in a regular school or in a special education school.

3.4. The New Curricula Framework⁵⁵

The New Curriculum Framework for Pre – University Education was approved two years ago and it is already piloted to the 1st/ 2nd and 6th/7th grade. As part of this study the document was reviewed highlighting inclusive education. The new curriculum is based on competences, in contrast with the previous one that was focused on achievement. It lists seven essential pupils’ competences: good communication and expression, thinking, learning, for life – entrepreneurship – environment, personal, civics and digital. Across these competences elements of inclusion are found more at civics and personal competences. It is also recommended that the pupils’ assessment should be comprehensive, based on a different sources that describe what they can achieve in terms of learning results..

One of the main principles on the curriculum is inclusion. According to the document the

“curriculum should recognize, accept, respect and react to the education needs, experiences, interests and values of all groups of pupils, regardless of their origin or characteristics. This

55 MoES (2014). The New Curriculum Framework for the Pre – University Education in the Republic of Albania. Tirana

principle aims in creating a curriculum that enables equal opportunities”.

The new curriculum promotes a child – centered approach and a child – friendly education environment that is safe, healthy and based on children’s rights. Effective teaching is supposed to aim at an active learning for all pupils taking into consideration the needs for an effective learning; learning is based on prior knowledge of each pupil. It calls for a differentiated teaching, that fulfills the needs of all pupils through different learning experiences. Schools are expected to create spaces that could include programs/modules related to education of children with special needs.

Overall, the New Curriculum Framework has a more inclusive approach, bearing in mind that it takes into consideration the needs and values of every child and promotes learning based on prior knowledge. Inclusion is a key principle and differentiated child – centered teaching is crucial for it. However, this approach should be mainstreamed in all the disciplines and competences, not only the personal and civic ones. Furthermore, all the new disciplines’ primary and secondary curricula should also mainstream inclusive concepts, for the teachers to be based on and apply on their classes.

4. PRE – SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION - FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In response to the growing currency towards inclusion around the world, teacher education institutions have shifted into pedagogy of teacher training in line with inclusive education. Ensuring the competence of pre-service teachers to cater to the needs of increasing range of diverse learners has been a great responsibility of schools of teacher education.⁵⁶ On this basis, the second part of this study focuses on pre – service teacher education and curriculum regarding inclusive education.

4.1. Curriculum review

Many curricula expect all students to learn the same things, at the same time and by the same means and methods. But students are different and have different abilities and needs. It is important, therefore, that the curriculum be flexible enough to provide possibilities for adjustment to individual needs and to stimulate professors to seek solutions that can be matched with the needs, abilities and learning styles of each and every student.

According to UNICEF webinars on inclusive education regular teacher training often fails to provide teachers with the confidence, skills and knowledge they need to support the learning of children with disabilities in regular classes. The lack of support for all teachers to meet the needs of all learners is one of the key reasons why so many children with disabilities are still not attending school, drop out early or are excluded from learning within the school. All teachers need appropriate initial training, in-service support and continuous professional development in inclusive education.³⁶ Teachers who are trained in inclusive education are able to recognize and value diversity among students and are more positive towards the inclusion of children

56 Bustos, R., Lartec, J. De Guzman, A.J., Casiano, C., Carpio, D. and Tongyofen, H.S. (2012). Integration of Inclusive Education Subject in the Curriculum of Pre-service Teachers towards Transformation: Exploring its Impact and Effectiveness. *The Asian Conference on Education 2012 Official Conference Proceedings 2012*

with disabilities in regular schools⁵⁷.

The curriculum review was another method used in this research to identify the possible gaps in this component in relation to inclusive education. The curricula were reviewed for the Bachelor and Master degrees at the three Faculties of Education and the Department of Social Work and Social Policy in Tirana.

Content analysis of the curriculum and the different detailed syllabuses revealed the following themes: (1) the nature of the curriculum in relation to inclusive education and its values, like equality, rights, participation, learning, community, respect for diversity, trust and sustainability, compassion, honesty, courage and joy (2) possible connections between the individual educational plan and the general curriculum.

Faculties of Education, Departments of Primary and Pre – Primary Education

Three different Faculties of Education and the relevant departments of primary and pre – primary education were part of the study, namely Faculty of Education in Shkodra, Gjirokastra and Durres. The content analysis showed that there is a common ground for the three faculties in relation to inclusive education, meaning that there are some core courses related directly to inclusive education or to special education (at the Bachelor’s level). For instance, in all three faculties the compulsory course called “Inclusive education” was part of the curriculum, usually within a module alongside with a developmental psychology course. However, when reviewing the syllabuses of inclusive education or special education the information mentioned at the topics of each week referred to a considerable amount to different developmental disorders. On one side these information are very relevant to inclusive education, but on the other students need to know also how to work with these pupils, not only their characteristics. The development of an IEP was only one lecture at the end of the course.

In one case, the course on inclusive education had a more broad approach focusing on pupils’ diversity and not only on children with disabilities. Inclusive education is not only developmental disorders, it has a much more broader approach: Inclusive Education is the means by which teaching methods, curriculum, staff and pedagogy support and are adapted to the learning of ALL students, including those students who traditional systems have not been able to reach.

Teaching methods on different courses, like Geography, Biology or Didactics, didn’t include any information around inclusive education. This creates a gap between the in – service teachers’ challenges

57 UNICEF (2015). Teachers, inclusive, child centred teaching and pedagogy. Retrieved from <http://www.inclusive-education.org/basic-page/inclusive-education-booklets-and-webinars> accessed on February 2016.

and the current curriculum: they mostly required information regarding the differentiated work with children with special education needs, objectives formulation and development of IEP.

Other courses that incorporated inclusive education concepts in one or more lectures at the Bachelor level were:

- Education for democracy or Civics Education, where concepts related to values were included as well as the partnership between school, parents and community;
- Communication skills, a lecture of it refers to differentiated communication according to individual differences, the child's temperament and character as well as based on the level of pupil's development;
- Human rights education, referring to the right of all children to education;

Children's right and child protection, it included a variety of concepts in relation to inclusion like parents' training for inclusion, the right to development, child friendly environment, children with disabilities and their risk for abuse, family violence and child protection, cognitive/social and emotional needs of children; The below table gives a more clear picture on the relevant courses taught currently in all the educational departments of the study. As seen inclusive education is part of the curriculum, however only at the Durres University it has a more broader approach, as it should, and it is not only focused on children with disabilities.

Education departments and the presence of inclusive education

University of Gjirokastra Department of Primary Education	University of Shkodra Department of Primary Education	University of Durres Department of Primary Education
Special education Inclusive education (it mainly refers to developmental disorders)	Developmental psychology	Developmental psychology
Child protection	Inclusive education (it mainly refers to developmental disorders)	Inclusive education (a more thorough approach towards inclusion)
Civic and democratic education		School and community (elective course)

Department of Pre – primary education	Department of Pre – primary education	Department of Pre – primary education
The right for development	Developmental psychology	Inclusive education
Civic and democratic development	Inclusive education (it mainly refers to developmental disorders)	Early childhood developmental psychology
Developmental psychology	Civic and democratic education	Civic education
Educational psychology		Education for children’s rights

At the Master’s Level the inclusive education was more merged in the curriculum, mainly in lectures. For instance, there were courses like “Pupils’ diversity and class communication” that had many notions of inclusive education, like: cultural diversity, sex and gender, special pupils (in this lecture information regarding children with special needs and teaching strategies is included), family of children with disabilities and their needs for support, the teacher and parent of children with disabilities, inclusion dimensions etc. Other courses included: children’s rights and their protection, civics education, legislation on state and government in Albania, learning theories and practices, psycholinguistics (only one lecture), teaching models and methods etc. School Psychology had many inclusive education concepts, like the psycho - educational assessment and special education, special pupils, the social teacher, talented children and children with learning disorders.

The below table gives a more clear picture of the master degrees offered up to date in all three universities and its relevant courses/merged concepts on inclusive education. A more systemic approach to inclusive education which will be reflected through a course on its own and the obligation to incorporate its concepts to other courses is recommended.

Master level and presence of inclusive education concepts/syllabuses		
University of Gjirokastra Master of Arts (Professional) in “History and Geography”	University of Shkodra	University of Durres Master of Arts (Professional) in “Didactics”
Knowledge for civic education (it gives knowledge on different groups of children in relation to their rights)	N/A	Special education (it only refers to CwD)
Master of Science in “Teaching for primary education 1st to 4th grade”	Master of Science in “Teaching for primary education”	Master of Science in “Teaching Psychology – Sociology”
Pupils’ diversity and class communication (a more thorough approach towards diversity)	Learning theories and practice (different learning styles, different intelligences, talented pupils)	Pupil counselling and ethics (tolerance, multicultural environments, children with physical special needs)
Family and community in child’s education (it has lectures on CwD and the role of the family)	Educational psychology (psycho - educative assessment, special pupils, social teacher, behavioural problems in schools)	
Children’s rights and their protection (it has some concepts on CwD and children’s different needs)	Models and methods of teaching, curriculum development (differentiated working with pupils)	

Florian and Rouse (2009) argue that modules or units on special education in initial teacher education serve to ‘reinforce the sense of separation that characterises special education and leads to the belief that such children are the responsibility only of those who have undertaken specialist courses’⁵⁸. This belief is stated by some of the professors during FGDs:

“....well, the term inclusion doesn’t mean that we have to have a separate course for it. We can merge concepts of inclusion in each and every course; we have the academic freedom to do so. Inclusive education is not a new concept, it has been over 15 years that we are discussing about it, we have been part of trainings and each of us has its own perspective that can adapt it to our courses, e.g. I have included it in each of my courses...” Professor, Gjjirokastra

Other departments

The other departments included in the study were the Social Work and Social Policy Department at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Tirana. The curriculum of these degrees even though it doesn’t contain a course named inclusive education at the Bachelor’s level; it has many of the values incorporated in many courses. For instance, courses like Social Policy, Social Work Practice with Children/in Schools, Social Work Ethics, Research Methods etc. had lectures that referred to inclusive education values and not the concept per se. At the Master’s Level, the Master in Advanced Social Work with concentration on education has a course on children with special educational needs and inclusive education.

4.2. The profile of an “inclusive” teacher

According to Franzkowiak (2009), introductory courses on inclusive education should be mandatory for all teacher education students, that bachelor and master courses should include inclusive education and combined degree programmes for primary and special education should be promoted. The university career of these students is the big stepping stone to their future professional undertakings with inclusive education in their minds and hearts⁵⁹.

58 Florian, L. and Rouse, M. (2009) The inclusive practice project in Scotland: Teacher education for inclusive education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25 (4), 594-601

59 Franzkowiak, T. (2009) *Integration, Inklusion, Gemeinsamer Unterricht – Themen für die Grundschullehrer*innenbildung an Hochschulen in Deutschland? Eine Bestandsaufnahme*. [Integration, inclusion, inclusive education – topics of primary school teacher training at universities in Germany? A Survey] Bidok Digitale Volltextbibliothek, Retrieved from <http://bidok.uibk.ac.at/library/franzkowiak-integration.html> Last accessed 21/03/10 accessed on January 2016

Including courses related to inclusive education in the university curriculum is one of the most common methods used to create positive attitudes and beliefs towards it. Nonetheless, literature suggests that this is only one part in preparing “inclusive” teachers, thus teachers that have inclusive values that are ready to put them in practice. Based on this notion for an inclusive teacher profile professors had varied opinions and approaches. On the one hand there were some that believed that their whole curriculum and teaching is inclusive – oriented and on the other hand, other professors thought that the teacher – students are still “traditional” in the way they are delivering teaching and work with students. The inclusion – oriented curriculum and teaching is reported more frequently and is more evident in social work curriculum.

“Social work students are oriented initially towards inclusion and they are educated with this thinking. I am convinced that a social worker that graduates from this department can identify and treat a child with special needs” Professor, Tirana

In relation to professors of the Education Departments the perceptions were mostly leaning towards a superficial inclusive curriculum and teaching perspectives and in many cases professors thought that it is not always their responsibility for their students’ predispositions to learn.

“The teacher learns about human development from 0 to the end of life. But our curriculum should be more specified, and emphasize more the school years, it shouldn’t be like a default. The teacher needs to know how to behave/react when faced with a child with disability, in order for them to be emotionally prepared, they need practical information. Our teachers should get more specified and practical information; therefore I believe that our students are not completely prepared” Professor, Gjirokastra

These findings are in line with current literature, in which it is described that the more common model is that of mandatory or elective courses on inclusive and/or special education⁶⁰.

Assistant teachers

None of the Faculties or Departments released a degree for an assistant teacher, and the professors were aware of this gap. Considering this is a new job for Albania the relevant education departments haven’t reflected yet the need for this degree. They reported that they would be ready to establish a Master’s course in order to prepare assistant teachers.

“I don’t think that we are able to prepare assistant teachers because initially this teacher

60 Van Laarhoven, T., Munk, D., Lynch, K., Bosma, J. and Rouse, J. (2007) A model for preparing special and general education pre-service teachers for inclusive education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58 (5), 440-455

Dr. Veronika Duci, Dr. Marina Ndrio, Prof.Dr. Edmond Dragoti, Prof. Assoc. Irida Agolli (Nasufi), Dr. Emanuela Ismaili

should be a humanitarian. Our teachers are traditional, pedant. They only do their four hours of math and gym...while vulnerable children might even be hungry, but the traditional teacher doesn't know that" Professor, Gjirokastra

"A mainstream teacher has never treated children [with special educational needs] because he doesn't know how to do it, how can he be an assistant teacher? He does not have the right qualification to do this job. The assistant teacher should be specialized for different problems that children might demonstrate in class" Professor, Shkodra

Knowledge and impact of legislation

Professors were generally informed on legislation and tried to incorporate it alongside with educational policies in their relevant courses. Nonetheless, there were professors that believed that due to the weak links with the REA they are not officially informed for the changes that are going on, they do so with their own personal initiative. None of the universities had a continuous collaboration with REA besides the students' practice, even though both reported that they would like to have a more close collaboration.

"Yes, we know we have a good legislative framework but it's not implemented. I believe that every department is informed about the law because it has many courses that refer to the legislation" Professor, Durres

4.3 The role of students' teaching practice

The importance of the practicum in any model of teacher education is stressed by Hagger and McIntyre (2006) who say: *'whatever student teachers need to learn to do as teachers in schools for their future careers, it is in schools that they need to learn to do these things'*⁶¹.

Bridging theory and practice can be problematic, as it appears difficult to change teachers' behaviour once their teaching routines have become established⁶². If mainstream teachers leave student teaching with a strong practical base in the most effective instructional techniques, the need for expensive work to change their practice later will not be needed.

In the participant higher education institutions teaching practice faces the same problems as in

61 Hagger, H. and McIntyre, D. (2006) *Learning teaching from teachers* Maidenhead: Open University Press

62 Gersten, R. and Dimino, J. (2001) The realities of translating research into classroom practice. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 16, 120-130

other countries. It is common that teaching practice to be rather formal than essential. There are many practical challenges in this direction, e.g. the supervising teacher doesn't have any financial or other motivation to have an average of 5 students during his/her teaching hours; they should also fill the student's file with all relevant information. It functions commonly based on the professors' personal network. When teaching practice is functional students get the chance to know the challenges of a diverse classroom and they ask much more questions about working with children with disabilities and vulnerable children in general.

“At the bachelor's level the teaching practices are mainly fictive. We ask students to have 3 hours of practice each week and they go to classes. They are very curious about inclusion, particularly students that are in schools with children with disabilities, they are more aware compared to the ones that don't have this experience. For example, they ask us on how to prepare an IEP and for to refresh them, they see it as their future work”
Professor, Durres

Other professors have included practice in their courses which is not part of the practice included at the curriculum. In this direction, some professors send their students to special education institutions or to centres/institutions for children with special needs in order to gain more practice and observe more children. This has been a positive experience but it remains a not systemic approach.

“We have send students to observe children at the school and after this we discuss how these children were treated by the mainstream teacher and the assistant teacher, by other students” Professor, Gjirokastra

When in teaching practice students understand the challenges that in – service teachers face in relation to inclusion, like: lack of infrastructure and didactic materials, lack of qualifications and knowledge on working with children with disabilities, absence of assistant teachers, overcrowded classes etc. For some of these challenges they can require information from their professors, e.g. how to work with children with disabilities, while for others government needs to invest more in this direction.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The need for ‘high quality’ teachers equipped to meet the needs of all learners becomes evident to provide not only equal opportunities for all, but also education for an inclusive society. Reynolds (2009) says that it is the knowledge, beliefs and values of the teacher that are brought to bear in creating an effective learning environment for pupils, making the teacher a critical influence in education for inclusion and the development of the inclusive school⁶³.

5.1. In – service teachers experience

This study put an emphasis on knowledge, attitudes and practices of in – service teachers. The main conclusions based on the findings of the study are:

- Teachers still have lack of information in relation to inclusive education, they are trying to be informed through internet, informal sharing of experience and other informal means. Inclusion is not perceived as a motivation for teachers for improving their teaching methods;
- There are no formal procedures for knowledge sharing like cluster or professional training and peer support among teachers;
- University studies for many teachers didn’t include a course or any relevant information to inclusive education, therefore teachers do not always understand the barriers of pupils within the classroom neither the complexity of issues related to disability;
- Teachers that have pursued a Master degree in recent years are more informed on inclusive education, but not in working with children with disabilities, however in most of the cases inclusive education is mostly related to CwD and not all children ;
- Inclusive education is commonly related only to CwD and rarely in other groups of vulnerable children at risk of being marginalized;

63 Reynolds, M. (2009). Education for Inclusion, Teacher Education and the Teacher Training Agency Standards. *Journal of In-Service training*, 27 (3)

- Trainings or other qualifications provided by NGOs in Albania relevant to inclusive education had an impact in informing and changing teachers' attitudes and practices;
- More qualified and trained teachers were more positive and optimistic in relation to the inclusive education implementation in Albania, an indicator that calls for further teacher qualification on this subject;
- Rural area teachers face more challenges in relation to inclusive education: psychosocial experts don't go to these schools, children with disabilities don't have a chance to be put on an appropriate class, parents' are more close – minded in accepting their children's difficulties and school infrastructure is not satisfying;
- CwD multidisciplinary treatment is in place in all four sites of the study, but it does not function in an optimal way. REA multidisciplinary committee although established has problems with the doctor's that have to be part of it;
- There is an evident lack of qualified assistant teachers, even when they are appointed they are very few in relation to the needs and not qualified for this job, even teachers that have information for CwD are not always informed on working with vulnerable children in general; Teachers face challenges in developing an IEP due to their lack of knowledge and understanding the way IEP should be developed, the assessment methods for CwD, the developmental milestones for CwD;
- Psychosocial experts are a great help for teachers, they are more informed on disability and inclusive education. However, they are few in relation to the needs for them;
- Schools with diverse pupils, particularly the ones with Roma and Egyptian community, are facing community discrimination from the parents' side. Parents don't prefer to enrol their children in these schools resulting in a total number decline and in further segregation of them;
- A major problem for teachers are children that are not diagnosed and that their parents deny their disability; therefore teachers are not entitled to have a class with a smaller number of children or ask for an assistant teacher or work with a IEP. The respect for the children and their families does not imply that education employees should accept everything a parent/teacher/manager serves, but their engagement to know better and assess the children themselves;
- Overall teachers are informed on education policies and legislation related to inclusive education. However, they sometimes don't know the relevant procedures for communicating with the school and REA structures;
- In general, teachers hold positive attitudes towards inclusive education, for every child. They embrace its values and prefer diversity over homogeneity. However, they are hesitant for its

implementation, particularly in the Albanian context where there are still many challenges for access, supports and participation;

- The Law on Pre – university education that tackles inclusion is partially implemented; in practice many challenges still exist, like school infrastructure, assistant teachers, supports for CwD in order to participate in all school and out of school activities etc.
- REA doesn't have any formal means for teachers motivation in relation to inclusive education; for instance it cannot assist teachers in developing IEPs on a regular basis but it does so upon request, it does not provide trainings or other qualifications for teachers and has limited budget for providing didactic material when necessary;
- Diversity is becoming part of education institution discourse.
- The New Education Curricula has a more inclusive approach, is child – centred and promotes equal opportunities; however inclusion needs to be mainstreamed in all disciplines and implemented in a precise manner; .
- There is still a lack of understanding that every pupil is an individual and that all actors should collaborate to find the appropriate reactions towards diversity in schools;
- The inclusive education approach is not transformed in an institutional education practice and inclusion is not perceived as a process;
- Teachers were still not clear in regard to the tests and home assignments that are part of the inclusion and about the fact that pupils can be assessed based on their efforts and not only on their achievements.

5.2. Pre – service teacher education

Teachers need confidence in their ability and the knowledge and skills in inclusive education to meet the challenges that they will encounter in the present school climate ⁶⁴. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2010) propounds that teacher education should be at the “centre” of inclusive education reform hence, the need to see pre- service teacher education as a beginning in the long journey of inclusive education. It further argues that preparing teachers for inclusive education should include strategies aimed at transforming teachers’ practices, which are largely influenced by their attitudes, beliefs, and values.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Carroll, A., Forlin, C. and Jobling, A. (2003) The impact of teacher training in special education on the attitudes of Australian pre-service general educators towards people with disabilities. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 30 (3), 65-79

⁶⁵ European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2010). *Teacher education for inclusion: an international literature review*. Denmark.

In terms of the pre – service teacher education in Albania the results indicate that:

- Faculties of Education and respective Departments have included a course on inclusive education at their Bachelor and Master level, however this course is focused on Cwd and it doesn't contain any information on other vulnerable children that require the same attention by the teacher; ;
- Specific information on working with children with different needs (all vulnerable children) alongside with the theoretical information is much needed in all curricula; Relevant courses like Didactics and Teaching Methods don't have any information on inclusive education and on how to work with diverse pupils;
- Inclusion values are mainstreamed in the curriculum of all Faculties and Departments, particularly at the Department of Social Work and Social Policy;
- Professors perceive that their departments are still preparing traditional mainstream teachers and not inclusive, even though their curriculum has been changed and adapted the last years;
- None of the higher education institutions of the study released a degree for an “assistant teacher”; however all the departments of Education would seriously consider establishing a new Master's degree on this profile;
- In some cases, departments prepared modules on inclusive education for teachers' trainings; this initiative was considered positive but it faced procedural and bureaucratic difficulties;
- Teacher practice serves as a first place to counter with diverse classrooms; students that do their practice in these schools are much more aware and interested for this topic, they consider it as a part of their future job;

5.3. Recommendations

Recommendations for the **in service inclusive education** experience are based on the empirical findings of the study. Specifically, recommendations for the in – service education system are:

- In the medium term the development and issuing of inclusive education teacher standards as well as policy guidelines for schools to use in recruiting and assessing staff are considered crucial;
- Awareness raising and capacity building of teachers in relation to inclusive education, through planning further qualifications and trainings for all teachers;
- The development of a formal active network of teachers in which they can exchange experiences and share information is considered necessary;

- Further qualification of mainstream teachers and assistant teachers in working with children with disabilities and provide support for the development of IEPs;
- Restructure and re – organize the workload for psychosocial experts in order for them to assist better the schools, teachers and children;
- Assistant teachers should be appointed for every child that needs them, based on the Law on Pre – University Education; the MoES should increase the total number of teachers in order to include and plan the budget for assistant teachers;
- Assistant teachers need to be intensively trained in issues relevant to inclusive education and children with disabilities;
- Increase of funding for school infrastructure in order to create access and supports for children with disabilities in all schools;
- Provision of relevant didactic materials for all children with disabilities by REA
- Monitor children’s enrolments in schools in order not to deny access and enrolment for any child;
- Engagement of parents in child’s school life; teachers and psychosocial experts, in collaboration with REA, should encourage discussions with parents of undiagnosed children and use different methods to assist them in accepting the child’s disability; this can be subject for child protection and educational negligence;
- REA should inform all teachers on relevant procedures, like IEP preparation, Committees functioning and competences etc.
- It is an immediate need to ensure an intersectorial collaboration with all relevant actors that implement the right of every child to education;
- Assessment and treatment of emotional needs of pupils are a prerequisite for the development of inclusive schools.
- Teachers should take ethical issues into consideration throughout the implementation of inclusive processes;
- It is important for an education employee to avoid the negative impact of his/her characteristics in professional life;
- An education employee should not be judgemental to the child or family, but it needs to understand them beyond any prejudice.

For the pre – service education it is suggested:

- For the Faculties of Education: to review their curricula and include more courses on inclusive education and diverse classroom and to widen the information given at the current courses aiming at providing modern practices in the field of inclusive education;
- To include information in relation to working with children with disabilities and relevant developmental milestones for them;
- To review the didactic practices and provide specific information on Teaching Methods or Didactics regarding different methods of working with CwD and other vulnerable groups of children, particularly for the secondary school;
- To intertwine teaching practice and theory in order for future teachers to feel confidence in working in diverse classrooms;
- To establish a Master’s degree for an “assistant teacher”;

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