



**National Dialogue on
“Development of the roadmap to inclusive education as per CRPD General Comment 24/4 on Inclusive Education”
18 September 2018**

In September 2016, CRPD Committee adopted and published the General Comment No. 4 (2016) Article 24: Right to inclusive education. The General Comment elaborates a clear and detailed definition of inclusive education that now represents the position of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which will inform their examinations of States Parties in respect of their action to progress implementation of Article 24. In so doing, it clarifies that all children with disabilities must be educated in inclusive environments and that it is the responsibility of the education system to adapt to accommodate the needs of all students, irrespective of abilities and impairments, within inclusive environments. Segregated schools, which provide education for specific impairments, do not constitute inclusion. Similarly, placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organization, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion.

Education of children with disability in Albania is often poor quality, sets low expectations and limits learners’ opportunities. By contrast, a truly inclusive learning environment values the contribution and potential of persons with disabilities, and equips them with essential life, language and social skills. The OHCHR Thematic Study of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to Education (2013) affirms that only inclusive education can provide both quality education and social development for persons with disabilities, and a guarantee of universality and non-discrimination in the right to education.

Commentary 4 to the Article 24 of the CRPD is a good momentum to address some of the key issues in the inclusive education processes and education reforms in Albania. UNICEF, World Vision Albania, Save the Children and the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, along with other national and international partners supporting intervention to inclusive education, such as the Swiss Development Cooperation, etc. organized a high-level meeting on Article 24. National dialogue impacted the mobilization and information of a wide range of key stakeholders on the importance and vision of inclusive education and which agreed upon a series of recommendations for an inclusive quality education in Albania.



It is expected that these recommendations will guide MESY in drafting a new pre-university strategy and stakeholders in order to: establish new environments and inclusive curricula for all students; construct new school buildings and kindergartens according to inclusive standards whereas adapt existing ones to an inclusive approach; implement quality standards to an inclusive education, guarantee reasonable accommodation and increase financial and human resources; use resources from segregated schools in inclusive schools; have all teachers equipped with skills and knowledge to work in inclusive settings; foster partnership among professionals/ specialists to provide integrated services Within schools spaces with the view of child development and academic support.

Recommendations

Legal framework and policies

- There should be a shift from the dual education system (currently in place with special schools and public schools) to a single system what of inclusive education, hence, special schools should transform gradually and their resources should be used within inclusive schools (it is necessary to reflect this into the law and in Albanian government's long-term strategies).
- It is necessary to improve the legal framework in compliance with reasonable accommodation (it is also necessary to define inclusive education in strategic documents in line with the convention, as well as definition of disability according to the biopsychosocial model).
- The law on pre-university education should be reviewed (focusing on the amendments to Article 64 which provides for children with disabilities to leave school if parents shall deem that their children is not provided with quality education) in order to guarantee access and quality education according to the child's needs. Inclusive school culture should be evident in elements of decision-making structures, parent participation to school decision-making bodies, specific standards, school policies, greater support to school initiatives in a school autonomy framework that supports elements of inclusive culture and accessibility, support and movement from one cycle to the other and exams and graduation of youth with disabilities.
- The law on accessibility needs to be implemented not only in new schools but also in all schools and their environments. This also applies to other education institutions, especially in pre-school. Furthermore, the private sector should answer to the law on accessibility and ensure the highest accessibility standard.
- Education system budgets should be estimated at local and national levels based on a specific formula which takes into consideration each student' s special needs; the qualification of the teaching and support staff; the necessary psycho-social service workers' number according to school needs; infrastructure interventions to all school facilities based on the inclusive and reasonable accommodation standards; school needs for supportive technology, etc.

The system, structures and coordination among stakeholders

- It is imperative that inclusive education interventions begin from the pre-school system and continue through all education cycles, including vocational education.
- Immediate need for a responsible structure in MESY on inclusive education that reaches to the RED/EO level.
- RED and educational institution statistics should have clear data on children with disabilities and learning disabilities and should be disaggregated by gender, age and support type. Data including specific indicators should be collected¹ based on the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) for each child learning needs, including support services needs depending on the disability, pursuant to **the legal obligation** (DCM No.708, dated 26.08.2015²) to carry out this.
- There should be qualified staff within the national inspectorate structures, capable of monitoring the implementation of inclusive policies at the national, educational institution and education offices/directorates level.
- There is the need for institutional coordination at school, RED/EO, municipality level and cross ministries to provide integrated services at school level, as well as psycho-social, medical and therapeutic support should be intertwined with each child's special needs.
- RED should align the Evaluation Commission's work so that it shall exercise its activity prior to the academic year, which in turn would help educational institutions (kindergartens and schools) to plan for its human resources and necessary materials for each child with disabilities.
- It should be guaranteed that Evaluation Commissions at RED and IEP draft commissions in educational institutions (school and kindergarten) be complete both from member and expert composition, as stipulated by law. There is a greater need for health sector professionals as regards to their presence and maximum contribution to these commissions.
- There should be institutional coordination at local level to ensure the functioning of the referral system. This also applies to cases of children with disabilities who do not attend, drop out or are at risk of dropping out of school, in order to achieve early detection.
- The child should not adapt to the system – rather the system should create adaptation to the environment, curricula, textbooks and flexible programs, teachers and trained staffed, etc. to guarantee the right to education.
- The IEP should be coherent with additional services such as rehabilitation, therapy, etc. Further additional services are an integral part to the development plan of children with disabilities. The school's cooperation to other support services and vice versa enables the achievement of IEP objectives.

¹Based on these indicators, specific needs are identified, such as (a) the presence of specialists who would provide therapeutic services, like speech therapists; (b) textbooks in various formats, including simplified formats, large-font formats, Braille or audio texts, etc.; (c) didactic materials which would facilitate the teaching and learning process; (d) support teachers; (e) sign language interpreters; (f) settings which would create opportunities for individual work while being closer to their peers without disabilities in class, as well as in order to relax or benefit from further support services, including psychosocial, physiotherapy, speech therapy support, etc.

² DCM No. 708, dated 26.08.2015 sets forth new requirements for statistical information on children and people with disabilities. Databases should be completed with further indicators which shall identify support services to guarantee quality education to children with disabilities.

Access

- Active participation of stakeholders shall be ensured in all policies drafted about inclusion.
- The need for technology tools and software in schools to assist children with disabilities.
- The engagement of stakeholders in the policies implementation at school level (stakeholders: parent, community, teacher, school-level organizations etc.)
- The need for an inclusive spirit of the curriculum, school textbooks and school-level coordinated activities promoting diversity.
- The education institution must guarantee that the file of every child along with the IEP, student's progress and assessments accompany the child from one grade to another and from one educational level to the other. This would ensure a successful transition and also data on the type of support and progress for every child.
- Individual Educative Plans especially for lower and upper secondary education must be drafted including all subject teachers (according to the grade the child goes to)
- Guaranteeing that parents' opinions and thoughts will be reflected in the assessment of the RED committee and in the drafting of IEP.
- Children with disabilities, learning difficulties and gifted students should be provided with support since an early age (IEP plans, accessibility, support teachers, etc.)

Capacity building

- Professional development for support teachers in all cycles of pre-university education and basic notions on inclusive education according to inclusive education standards, and the training of support teachers should be also based on clear work profiles.
- The intentional and strategic engagement of professional networks in successful regional experience exchange platforms, learning from challenges and continued training on inclusive education.
- There should be a continued partnership between universities and pre-university education for the proper preparation of teachers with an inclusive approach and also for the coordination of school practice of students who study social sciences, teaching, medical school (speech therapy, physiotherapy, pediatrics)
- Multidisciplinary Commissions for children with disabilities in RED should be assigned clear duties and be offered continued professional training.
- Capacity building of school principals in order to create a fully educational and inclusive environment (Universities play an important role for the training of principals)
- Training programs should be based on the spirit of inclusive education, not only for children with disabilities.
- The assessment should be made according to the Bio-psycho-social model (ICF) and the capacity building of RED staffs and commissions in schools related to this. In relation to the bio-psycho-social assessment, the legal framework should be aligned with that of the local level commissions that have the obligation to conduct the assessment.