

EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN EUROPE AND BALKAN

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is a subject and a requirement of all European institutions in the EU and the Council of Europe, many families, experts, non-governmental organizations and individuals. This research represents a study of different concepts and implementation of inclusive education in Europe and Balkan. The paper is a result of a research of education systems, systems of support, legislation and evaluation of positive practice in the countries of the European Union and three countries in the Balkans: Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo. The research sample consists of 6 countries from Europe and three countries in the Balkans. The condition for the research countries to be included in the sample is based on the population number not being larger than 8 million. Because of the relevance of the comparative analysis, two older state members of the European Union were chosen (Austria, the Flemish and the French region of Belgium), two members of the European Union (Estonia and Slovenia), two Scandinavian countries (Finland and Norway) and three countries in the Balkans: Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro.

Key words: *Children with special educational needs, children with disabilities, inclusive education, European Union.*

INTRODUCTION

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (further the Agency), emphasizes that everything that is good for the children with special needs is actually good for all children (Meijer, 2003, p. 4). Throughout Europe there is a tendency of development of new forms of inclusion of children with SEN, who require additional support in order to participate in the regular education system. In the last thirty years, in Europe and the whole world in general, the number of countries which create education policies and financial resources intended for the children who do not have or access or their access to the regular

education curriculum is obstructed from different reasons, is increasing. According to Terzi (2005, p. 444), most commonly these children are: children with SEN, children with learning difficulties and children from vulnerable groups (children in multilingual environments, poor and sick children). Defining the groups of children depends on the used classification and international organizations. It is understandable that the inclusion of all groups of children in ethnically heterogeneous society is a sensitive process that requires time and resources due to the relations between the dominant community and the minorities

Research subject

The subject of this research are the characteristics of education systems in the European countries and Kosovo, as a condition for better inclusion of children with special needs in regular education systems.

Methodology

As a base for the methodology of the research was used analysis of international documents, reviews and evaluations. Analysis of education development processes in the last 20 years, which are fundamentals for policy creation and assessment of the situation, represent one of the most important elements of this research. The following methods are used in this research:

- Method of theoretical analysis based on the description of the systems of education;
- Method of comparison;
- Methods of descriptive statistics based on the obtained statistic data represented in frequency (f).

Sample

The education systems in 7 different countries are included in the research sample:

- 2 countries members of the European Union (Austria and Belgium, Flemish and French region);
- 2 recent members of the European Union (Estonia and Slovenia);
- 2 Scandinavian countries (Norway and Finland);
- 3 Balkan countries (Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo).

The countries included in the research have a population of up to 8 million. The base for the research analysis are the databases of EUROBASE – National system overviews on Education in Europe and on going reforms (www.eurydice.org) and European Agency for people with Special Needs and Inclusion education (www.european-agency.org), Eurostat, OECD. The data were obtained through:

Literature studying;
Monitoring of statistics and statistical databases.

Results

Inclusion of children with SEN

There are various practices in Europe, but in most of the countries exists two track system for the children with special educational needs. That means that the school systems are organized so that the specialized institutions enable the inclusion. Europe increasingly seeks to develop the forms and mechanisms of systems that could include children who cannot participate in the regular education system. Next are shown the main features of all groups of children involved in the research in the countries mentioned in the sample: Austria, Belgium (fl), Belgium (fr), Estonia, Finland and Slovenia (as European Union members), Norway (a Scandinavian country) and Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro (Balkan country).

Europe

Through charts and explanations tables of children with SEN are shown, in EU countries and other European countries and Kosovo.

Review of children with SEN

Table 1 – Education of children with SEN in the examined countries in 2010 (*Resource*: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, SNE Country data, 2010 - November 2012, EURYDICE, 2012)

Country	Inclusion		Segregation		Special classes in ES		Total number of students in %	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
AUSTRIA	15.773	2,0	11.787	1,5	965	0,12	28.525	3,6
BELGIUM (Fl)	8.245	1,0	46.091	5,30	N	N	54.336	6,3
BELGIUM (Fr)	220	0,03	30.773	4,50	N	N	30.993	4,5
ESTONIA	5.611	5,0	3.365	3,0	1.459	1,30	10.435	9,3
FINLAND	24.137	4,3	6.782	1,2	14.574	2,6	45.493	8,1
MACEDONIA	N	N	1.322	0.65	N	N	1.322	0,65
MONTENEGRO	1.432	1,23	256	0,22	86	0,07	1.774	1,52
KOSOVO	101	0,02	450	0.10	523	0,12	1.074	0,24
NORWAY	41.552	6,7	1.929	0,30	5.321	1,0	48.802	7,9
SLOVENIA	7.275	4,5	2.829	1,7	400	0,24	10.504	6,5

Table 2 shows the ratio of children set in inclusive forms of education (inclusion), in classes within the special institutions (segregation) and in special classes within regular schools in the countries included in the research for the academic 2010/2011. The results from the table indicate that Norway has the largest number of children in inclusive schools, 6.7%, followed by Estonia, Slovenia, both regions of Belgium and Kosovo. Belgium (Flemish region) has the highest percent of children educated in special institutions (segregation), 5.3% and 4.5% in the French region. The lowest percent of segregation appears in Norway by 0.30% and Finland, 1.20%. Regarding the segregation, Slovenia and Austria are almost at the same level, approximately 1.5%. The numbers about special classes in regular schools point out Finland where traditionally exists positive practice in this area, with 2.6%, followed by Estonia with 1.30% and Norway with 1%. Data on Montenegro

show a relatively large number of children in inclusive forms of education, respectively 1.23%, in segregative forms 0.22% and in special classes 0.07%. The other countries do not have significant deviation regarding the inclusion in special classes. If we analyze the total number of children with SEN, we can conclude that it is the highest in Estonia, Finland and Norway, then the Flemish region of Belgium, Slovenia, Austria, the French region of Belgium, Macedonia and Kosovo. The high number of children with SEN in Scandinavian countries indicates that the identification of the children is clearly determined on a level of the local communities. For Macedonia, there is a lack of data on inclusion of children with SEN in regular environments and data for special units, because the methodology for collecting data is not used in other countries of this research.

Segregation – Inclusion ratio

Table 3 – Number of children in inclusion and special institutions in 2010 (*Resource: SNE DATA, European Agency, 2010*)

Country	Generation of students	Inclusion		Special institution	
		f	%	f	%
AUSTRIA	802.519	15.773	2,0	11.787	1,5
BELGIUM - Fl.	871.920	8.245	1,0	46.091	5,2
BELGIUM – Fr.	687.137	220	0,03	30.773	4,4
ESTONIA	112.738	5.611	5,0	3.365	3,0
FINLAND	559.379	24.137	4,3	6.782	1,2
KOSOVO	301.486	101	0,03	831	0,27
MACEDONIA	204.439	N	N	1.322	0,65
MONTENEGRO	117.142	1.432	1,22	256	0,22
NORWAY	615.883	41.552	6,7	1.929	0,31
SLOVENIA	162.902	7.275	4,5	3.229	2,0

In order the inclusive process to be assessed, the inclusion-segregation ratio is of great significance. This ratio is related to the definition of SEN used in different countries and the support organization in the local community. Austria adopted the general definition and there are classified only the severe disabilities. The data in Belgium (both regions) show high number of children set in special institutions. In Finland it is recognizable that generally the children are set in inclusive models of education with approximately 4.3%. This fact is due to the highest number of children set in special classes within regular schools and only 1.2% set in special institutions. In Estonia there is a lower ration between regular and special education. In this country only 5% of the children are in regular schools and 3% are enrolled in special schools. Norway has a long tradition of inclusive education

system. Only 0.31% of the children are in special institutions and 6.7% of them go to regular schools. The same ration in Slovenia is 1:2 in favor of inclusion. In Macedonia, there is a lack of data for children with POP in inclusion due to the non-application of the methodology for data collection, while the percentage of coverage in the special institutions remains constant. Kosovo, although a small number of students, shows a positive result in favor of inclusion. We can conclude that in all countries of this research (for Macedonia there are no data), the inclusive process is developing well. We can conclude that in all of the countries from this research the process of inclusion develops positively except in the both regions of Belgium. For Montenegro, it is characteristic that the greater number of children in inclusion is 1.22%, than the segregated 0.22%.

Analysis of the legislative framework

Table 3 – Children with SEN legislation in the examined countries (*Resources: Data Eurydice 2012*)

Country	Status	General legislation	Special legislation
AUSTRIA	EU	✓	✓
BELGIUM	EU	✓	✓
ESTONIA	NEU	✓	✓
FINLAND	SC	✓	
KOSOVO	BA	✓	
MACEDONIA	BA		✓
MONTENEGRO	BA		✓
NORWAY	SC	✓	
SLOVENIA	NEU	✓	✓

The table shows the way countries approach the inclusion of children with SEN in the legislative framework. The countries which have general education legislation approach have more developed inclusive schools. Such countries are Finland, Norway and Kosovo. Some of the countries decided

LEGEND: EU – European Union member country
SC – Scandinavian country
NEU – Recent

Discussion and interpretation of the data

Analysis of inclusion-segregation ratio

The data regarding the education of students with SEN in Europe indicate that only 2% of SEN students are educated in segregated environments. It is difficult to assess the extent to which a progress has been made considering the number of segregated students and inclusive provisions in European countries. However, over the last few years, countries with relatively greater special needs in the education system, in separate cases, showed a continuous increase in the number of students in segregated environments, which now implement inclusive policies. In order to understand the inclusive processes as a whole, in some countries it is necessary to apply the processes of inclusion and

to regulate the SNE by both general and special legislation (Austria, Belgium, Estonia and Slovenia). Countries of Montenegro and Macedonia have regulated it through a special area for special educational needs.

(new) European Union member country
BA – Balkan country.

segregation. Table 17 displays that Belgium has a high percent of children with SEN in special schools. In Estonia, 5% of the children are in regular schools and 3% in special schools. This result can be changed in the further period, taking into account that since 2008, there are reforms and changes in progress. Finland characterizes with the fact there are many children in inclusive forms of education, around 4.3%. This percent mainly refers to children from separate classes in regular schools, and only 1.2% are in special schools. In Norway, the total number of children with SEN rose from 5.7% in 2004 to 7.9% in 2010. Slovenia is specific because the percent of children in special school remains constant for years (2%), but the number of included children is increasing. The data about Kosovo indicate that the children with SEN are not

properly identified. Because the legislative framework in Kosovo is in use, the reason about that could be the badly developed network of the Commission for identification of the children. Norway has a long tradition of inclusive education system. Only 0.31% of the children are in special institutions and 6.7% go to regular schools. When we analyze the data from the countries in this research, we can conclude that some are more oriented toward inclusion than others. Also, some of the countries are differently oriented in the implementation process or are currently in a process of education reforms. The data showed strong segregation trend in Belgium and Estonia. Data on Macedonia can not be statistically commented on, because we have received data for segregation alone, which amounts to 0.65%. In this research, most oriented countries towards inclusion are Austria, Finland, Montenegro, Slovenia, Macedonia, Norway and Kosovo. The statistical significance of the obtained data in individual countries have to be taken into consideration, regarding the previous statement, especially the data from Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. In this context, there is a dilemma about the monitoring, diagnostics and operation of the Committee for the evaluation of children with disabilities.

Analysis of the legislative framework

One of the main aspects is how the countries approach the inclusion of children with SEN in the legislative framework. Mostly the approach is related to the definition of the groups of children. Countries that have more general definitions tend to determine the rights of these children in the general legislative framework that regulates the education of all children. Thus on a declarative level, they are moving closer to the inclusive education and the concept "Schools for All" mentioned in the Salamanca Statement. In table 16 can be seen that most of the countries included in the research have combined legislative framework, which includes a mix of general and special education laws. Such countries are Austria, Belgium, Estonia and Slovenia. Only Finland, Norway and Kosovo regulate the education in the general legislative framework. Special laws have Montenegro and Macedonia. From the above it can be concluded that

the countries which have a basis for such a legislative framework are the countries that have a good general economic situation, tradition of inclusion of vulnerable children and have adopted general definitions of children with SEN (except Kosovo).

Overall assessment based on the data collected for individual countries

The data for the analysis in this paper show that EU Member States have no difficulty in collecting data, ie in the data collection are included other European institutions as well as non-EU countries. The collection of data at European level for the Member States are carried out according to the same methodology and the same standards at regular intervals.

CONCLUSION

One of the biggest challenges in the last twenty years, given the growing number of children with SEN in regular schools is how to provide necessary support on a local level and how to be established services of support. According to Muijsu (2011), the education system is under pressure to make a change that would allow inclusion of all children. Through our analysis, we tried to identify the various supports the children from different groups receive in the education system: **children with SEN**. We took into account that the countries, as well as the education systems, differ in terms of tradition of inclusive education, attitude towards human rights and financial opportunities (Mitchell, 2008). The countries relevant for this research have a population of up to 8 million: Austria, Belgium (old EU members), Estonia, Slovenia (new EU members), Finland and Norway (Scandinavian countries) and (Balkan country) Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. This criterion was taken into account because of the reliable comparisons of education systems. Data collection for this area is a task that requires time. That is due to the existence of non-standard statistical bases, different definitions of children with SEN and the procedures for their identification on the one hand and the sensitivity of the identities of the children and their families on the other. The collection of

other data used in the research is obtained from the statistical bases of the European Agency for the education of persons with disabilities and inclusive education, bases OECD and EURYDICE and statistical databases of the Ministry of Education in Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. The data are presented in tables and are expressed in structural percent. For the statistical analysis in the empirical part, the following statistical methods were used: frequency (f); structural percent (%). Considering that this is a case study, there is a greater risk with the statistical results. The practical value of this research is the development of foundation for practical proposals regarding the establishment of the legislative framework. The overall analysis showed that there is a positive orientation towards inclusive processes in all countries, including Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. Due to the economic situation and increasing population migration, the inclusion process happens at a slower rate. All education reforms in the countries of Europe have occurred because of the increased number of children with SEN. Because of this phenomenon there is a need of creating a new ways of conducting researches of the students that are going to be good for all children (students). One important thing for the initial comparison of the status of children with SEN in separate countries is the basic definition. From this can be concluded the direction in which the inclusive education goes and the attitude of the social environment towards diversity. Environments that have a long historical tradition in the field of inclusion often have a favorable economic situation. Examples for such countries are Austria, Belgium, Norway and Finland. Estonia is also moving towards that direction. In the basic definition, in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Slovenia are stated 8-9 groups of children with SEN. Slovenia has a well-established system for identifying children with SEN and provides enough support in the classroom and outside of it.

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