

MARIATERESA CAIRO
MARIA CONCETTA CARRUBA

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AND MEDIATED LEARNING IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EUROPE

In collaboration with ASuMIE Project Team



VITA E PENSIERO

RICERCHE
PEDAGOGIA E SCIENZE DELL'EDUCAZIONE

RICERCHE
PEDAGOGIA E SCIENZE DELL'EDUCAZIONE

MARIATERESA CAIRO
MARIA CONCETTA CARRUBA

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AND MEDIATED LEARNING IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EUROPE

In collaboration with ASuMIE Project Team



VITA E PENSIERO

RICERCHE
PEDAGOGIA E SCIENZE DELL'EDUCAZIONE



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



The present research was realised within the ASuMIE-project funded by Erasmus + KA2. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

www.vitaepensiero.it

Le fotocopie per uso personale del lettore possono essere effettuate nei limiti del 15% di ciascun volume dietro pagamento alla SIAE del compenso previsto dall'art. 68, commi 4 e 5, della legge 22 aprile 1941 n. 633.

Le fotocopie effettuate per finalità di carattere professionale, economico o commerciale o comunque per uso diverso da quello personale possono essere effettuate a seguito di specifica autorizzazione rilasciata da CLEARedi, Centro Licenze e Autorizzazioni per le Riproduzioni Editoriali, Corso di Porta Romana 108, 20122 Milano, e-mail: autorizzazioni@clearedi.org e sito web www.clearedi.org

© 2023 Vita e Pensiero - Largo A. Gemelli, 1 - 20123 Milano
ISBN 978-88-343-5441-4

INDEX

Introduction <i>Beno Schraepen</i>	VII
I. <i>Special Education and Inclusive Education in Europe: a pedagogical approach to support special educational needs</i>	3
1.1. Comparative education in the field of special education <i>Mariateresa Cairo</i>	3
1.2. The inclusive teacher's profile <i>Mariateresa Cairo</i>	7
1.3. Best practices and ideas to promote an inclusive school system <i>Mariateresa Cairo</i>	12
References	19
II. <i>Contributions</i>	25
2.1. On the road to inclusion: 7 partner countries <i>Mariateresa Cairo and Maria Concetta Carruba</i>	25
2.2. Inclusive education in Belgium <i>Beno Schraepen</i>	29
References	42
2.3. Inclusive education in Bulgaria <i>Magdalena Tsoneva</i>	44
References	65
2.4. Inclusive education in the Czech Republic <i>Lenka Krejčová, Daniela Pokorná, Jana Pechancová</i>	68
References	80

2.5. Inclusive Education in Italy <i>Mariateresa Cairo, Maria Concetta Carruba, Raffaella Rosas, Vinia Lovati, Fabio Regis</i>	81
References	106
2.6. Inclusive education in Norway <i>Gunvor Sønnesyn</i>	109
References	129
2.7. Inclusive education in Portugal <i>Adelinda Candeias, Adriana Félix, Edgar Galindo, António Portelada</i>	132
References	148
2.8. Inclusive education in Slovenia <i>Barbara Rot</i>	151
References	168
III. <i>The ASuMIE project</i>	171
3.1. The partners <i>Maria Concetta Carruba</i>	171
3.2. Theoretical framework and ASuMIE's goals <i>Maria Concetta Carruba</i>	179
3.3. The IO1 (Intellectual Output 1) <i>Maria Concetta Carruba</i>	184
3.3.1. Methodology of the research	186
3.3.2. The sample	191
3.4. Results <i>Maria Concetta Carruba</i>	198
3.4.1. Facilities	198
3.4.2. Life plan project and support system	210
3.4.3. Methods, methodologies and strategies more effective	220
3.5. Conclusion and outcomes <i>Mariateresa Cairo and Maria Concetta Carruba</i>	229
References	231

EUROPEAN COMMISSION, EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA, Quality education and training for All. Inclusive education, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/inclusive-education>.

OKAN (ONTHAALONDERWIJS VOOR ANDERSTALIGE KINDEREN) - Reception class for children with a different mother tongue, <https://www.vlaanderen.be/onderwijs-en-vorming/ondersteuning/onderwijs-voor-leerlingen-met-specifieke-noden/onthaalonderwijs-voor-anderstalige-kinderen-okan>.

THE SUPPORT MODEL IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION AND IN HIGHER EDUCATION, 2017, <https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=15071>.

UNITED NATIONS, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (06-10-2018), available from www.treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtmsg_no=IV-15&chapter=4.

2.3. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BULGARIA

*Magdalena Tsoneva*²

Legislative basis for Inclusive Education in Bulgaria

The main national and international documents that Bulgaria adopts regarding inclusive education are:

- 1991, Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent which promotes the right to non-discrimination of children and adolescents and equal opportunities for education;
- 1994, Declaration of Salamanca, which declares that the right to education is not enough to ensure that all children can study together. Schools are required to adapt and change to meet the needs of each child;
- 2002, the Public Education Act³ repeals Instruction 6 of 1977, according to which some children were categorized as “uneducable” and allows children with special educational needs to study in a general education school. This is subject to receiving a status of special educational needs based on a medical diagnosis. The term integrated education is still used.
- 2012, Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which stresses the right to equal access to inclusive and qual-

² Development and External Communications Specialist, Karin Dom Foundation, Bulgaria.

³ In 2002, the Public Education Act changes in the law regulated integrated training for learners with special educational needs (SEN) in pre-schools, general education schools and vocational schools (<https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/bulgaria/legislation-and-policy>)

ity education for people with disabilities. The state must ensure an education system that is based on inclusive education and that allows people with disabilities to develop their full potential and self-esteem, and a system that supports human rights and diversity.

As of August 1, 2016, a new Law on Preschool and School Education⁴

⁴ The Law on Pre-school and School Education was adopted in 2015. It repealed the Public Education Act and the Rules for the Public Education Act Enforcement, and Ordinance No. 1 of 23 January 2009 on the training of children and pupils with SEN and/or chronic diseases. Law on Pre-school and School Education regulates inclusive education: (1) Everyone has the right to education and may increase their education and qualification by learning throughout life. (2) Inclusive education is an inalienable part of the right to education (Art. 7). Pre-school institutions and school education, together with state and local authorities and structures and providers of social services, provide support for learners' personal development. In the pre-school and school education systems, support is provided to learners for personal development that leads to an adequate physical, psychological and social environment to develop their abilities and skills. Support for personal development complies with the individual educational needs of each learner. Psychologists or pedagogue counsellors, speech therapists, social workers and resource teachers work to ensure general and additional support in kindergartens and schools. The support for personal development is general and additional. General and additional support are provided to learners in the kindergartens, schools and personal development support centres that they attend. In cases described in Art. 111, para. 1, item 1 – in home or in hospital conditions, and if necessary to expand the general and additional support provided in kindergartens, schools and personal development support centres, and depending on the specifics of the activities – support can also be provided from a distance using information and communication technologies. General support for personal development includes: team work between teachers and other pedagogical specialists; additional training in subjects under the conditions of this law; additional modules for children who do not speak Bulgarian; additional consultations on subjects that are conducted outside regular school hours; consultations on subjects; career guidance for students; activities of interest; library and information services; health care; providing dormitories; encouragement with moral and material rewards; activities to prevent violence and overcome problem behaviour; early needs assessment and prevention of learning difficulties; speech therapy work.

General support is provided by kindergartens, schools and personal development support centres. Additional support for personal development includes: work with learners on a specific case; psycho-social rehabilitation, hearing rehabilitation and speech, visual rehabilitation, communicative rehabilitation for disorders and physical disabilities; providing affordable architectural, common and specialised support environments, technical means, specialised equipment, didactic materials, methodologies and specialists; providing training in special subjects for learners with sensory disabilities; resource support.

The additional support for personal development provides for learners with special educational needs, outstanding gifts or chronic diseases, and for those who are considered at risk. The type and forms of education, as well as the specific activities for additional support for personal development, are determined by a plan to support the learner.

Additional support for personal development is provided by kindergartens, schools, personal development support centres and specialised services units (<https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/bulgaria/legislation-and-policy>).

is in force. Inclusive education is a principle and part of the right to education. The center of support is returned to the school and school leadership is empowered to manage the process. The law broadens the groups of children who need additional support in a general education environment: in addition to children with SEN and chronic diseases, they now include both children at risk and gifted children.

The law defines education as a national priority, which is implemented in accordance with the principles of: equal access to quality education and inclusion of every child and every student and equality and non-discrimination in pre-school and school education.

Inclusive education, according to the Preschool and School Education Act (PSEA, 2016), is “a process of awareness, acceptance and support of the individuality of each child or student and the diversity of needs of all children and students by activating and including resources aimed at removing barriers to learning and learning to create opportunities for the development and participation of children and students in all aspects of community life”. At the state level, this is the first definition of inclusive education established by law.

Currently, inclusive education in Bulgaria is implemented on the basis of the Preschool and School Education Act (2016) and the Ordinance on Inclusive Education, in force since 27 October 2017, which sets the state educational standard for inclusive education.

The right to education. Compulsory pre-school and school education

In Bulgaria the law stipulates that inclusive education is an integral part of the right to education. The stages of the school system are:

- Nursery – for children from 10 months to 3 years, under the control of the Ministry of Health.
- Kindergarten – from 3 to 7 years. There are often nursery groups in kindergartens – 4% of children enrolled in kindergartens are under 3 years old.
- The children attend the so-called preparatory groups in kindergartens or preschool classes formed at schools. With an amendment to the Preschool and School Education Act from 2020 education becomes compulsory from the age of four. This change is expected to take effect by 2023 at the latest. Children of the age of 5 and 6 in the preparatory groups in kindergartens or schools that have not as yet been assessed, are evaluated for the risk of learning difficulties.

The age for compulsory preschool education changes from 5 to 4 years old with the adoption of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to

the Law on Preschool and School Education dated 09/08/2020. The change comes into effect gradually and is expected to cover all children from the aforementioned age group by the start of the 2023-2024 school year. This change aims to overcome illiteracy and prevent early school dropouts.

- School education from the age of 7. Children with SEN can be postponed from starting first grade at the request of parents, but for not more than 1 year.

Structure of education system in Bulgaria

<i>Ages</i>	<i>Stage of education</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Education programme</i>
3-6	Pre-primary education Compulsory from the age of 4	Preschool groups I, II, III, IV	Preschool education
7-10	Stage one of primary education (compulsory)	I, II, III, IV Grades	Primary education - basic
11-13	Stage two of primary education (compulsory)	V, VI, VII Grades	
14-16	Stage one of secondary education (compulsory)	VIII, IX, X Grades	Secondary education
17-18	Stage two of secondary education	XI, XII Grades	

Early needs assessment

The youngest children up to 3 years of age attend nurseries, which are under the control of the Ministry of Health and the care of children there is provided by nurses. The percentage of children in nurseries at the end of 2019 was 17.1%, well below the EU average. Another option for parents of young children is to enroll their children in nursery groups at kindergartens. Nursery groups have been opened in many kindergartens with children between 2 and 3 years of age. 4% of all children attending kindergartens are under 3 years old. The use of universal screening for child development at certain ages is still not adopted, as is the practice in other countries around the world. The above factors limit the opportunities for early detection of disabilities in children and referral to specialized support services. Children go to kindergarten in the year when they turn three. Kindergartens are under the control of the Ministry of Education and Science and have

4 age groups – for children from 3 to 7 years. Early assessment is performed when the child enters kindergarten for the first time. Since 2016 a new screening test was introduced for early assessment of the risk of learning difficulties for ages from 3 years to 3 years 6 months, according to a methodology approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. The screening was developed by a research team from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and is applied by specialists from kindergartens who have undergone special training for this purpose. The assessment is conducted individually for each child with the consent of the parents after informing them about the manner of conducting and the benefits of the screening. Depending on the results of the assessment, the need for general and/or additional support for personal development is determined for each child. Children at the age of 5 and 6 in the preparatory groups in kindergartens or schools that have not been assessed early, are assessed for the risk of learning difficulties.

<i>Statistical data 2020/2021</i>	<i>Kindergarten (3-7 years)</i>	<i>General education schools (I-XII grade)</i>	<i>Vocational schools</i>
Number of kindergartens/schools	1 823	1 948	418
Number of children/students enrolled	215 666	565 023	138 656
Total number of students in general and vocational schools		703 679	
Children/students receiving resource support	4 343	15 971	
Number of children with SEN – total		20 314	

Data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI) and the Ministry of Education and Science (MES)

Based on the above data of the NSI and MES we can see that the percentage of children receiving resource support varies from 2.01% for kindergartens to 2.27% for schools. This is a very small coverage percentage of children with special educational needs in Bulgaria. In addition, there is a significant number of children with special needs who receive support outside general education schools, in the Special Education Support Centers and in Special Schools.

Number of resource specialists who support children with SEN (2019)

<i>Resource specialists appointed in kindergartens and schools</i>	<i>Resource specialists at the Regional Centers for Support of the Inclusive Education Process</i>
4340	932

Transformation of Special Schools into Centers for Special Educational Support

An important moment for the development of inclusive education in Bulgaria is the transformation of the existing Special Schools into Centers for Special Educational Support (CSES). According to the law, children with special educational needs (SEN) are educated in the CSES, in cases where other possibilities for education in a general education environment have been exhausted. Additional specialists are appointed and, alongside education, therapies are provided to the children, so that the center can be visited by students and others needing additional support. In the process of transformation, MES has invested a lot of additional funds to build a modern and supportive environment that meets new needs. With funds from national programs, CSEs built a more accessible architectural environment, modernized their facilities, purchased equipment and teaching materials. Teachers were also trained to perform their new roles. Currently, there are 43 CSEs operating in the country. What is good as an idea is difficult to put into practice. Students are enrolled en masse in general education schools close to the CSES, but do not actually attend them and their educational needs are fully covered by the CSES. In rare cases they have joint activities. When that happens, there are a lot of difficulties with their educational program. Teachers from the mainstream school monitor the progress of students. Thus, the idea of real student inclusion is not realized.

Support for personal development of children and students

For the first time, the Preschool and School Education Act (2016) introduces two levels of child support-general, for all children and additional, for children who need more time, resources and support work. Additional support for personal development is provided to children and students: 1. with special educational needs; 2. at risk; 3. gifted; 4. with chronic diseases. Personal development support is implemented in accordance with the individual educational needs of each child and each student. General and additional support for personal development is provided in kindergartens, schools, personal development support

centers, including CSEs and specialized service units - Regional Centers for Support of the Inclusive Education Process (RCSIEP), established on the territory of each district. A psychologist or pedagogical advisor, a speech therapist, a social worker and resource teachers work for the implementation of general and additional support in kindergartens and schools.

General support for personal development includes: 1. teamwork between teachers and other pedagogical professionals; 2. additional training and consultations on subjects; 3. additional modules for children who do not speak Bulgarian; 4. career guidance of students; 5. activities of interest; 6. library and information services; 7. health care; 8. provision of a dormitory; 9. encouragement with moral and material rewards; 10. activities for the prevention of violence and overcoming problematic behavior; 11. early assessment of needs and prevention regarding learning difficulties; 12. speech therapy work.

Teamwork between teachers and other pedagogical professionals includes the exchange of information and good pedagogical practices to support teachers in improving classroom work, holding meetings to identify student support aimed at preventing violence, overcoming problematic behaviors, and prevention of learning difficulties.

The additional support for personal development includes: 1. work with a child and a student on a specific case; 2. psycho-social rehabilitation, rehabilitation of hearing and speech, visual rehabilitation, rehabilitation of communication disorders and physical disabilities; 3. provision of accessible architectural, general and specialized supporting environment, technical means, specialized equipment, didactic materials, methods and specialists; 4. providing training in special subjects for students with sensory disabilities; 5. resource support.

Additional support for personal development can be short-term or long-term. Short-term support for children or students with special educational needs covers a period of at least one school year to a maximum of the end of the respective stage of the level of education. Long-term covers more than one stage of the level of education, more than one level of education or lasts for the entire period of study of the child or student in kindergarten or school. To provide additional support for personal development, an assessment of the child's or student's individual needs is performed by a personal development support team.

Kindergarten and school teachers form a team to support personal development. The team also includes a psychologist and/or pedagogical advisor, speech therapist; parents and a resource teacher/special pedagogue may participate, as well as other specialists according to the

individual needs of the child or student as well as the representatives of the child protection authorities and the bodies for combating minors' anti-social behavior. The child's or student's parent/s also participate in the team's work. The team assesses individual needs, then prepares and implements a support plan.

There are 28 RCSIEPs (Regional Centres for Support of the Inclusive Education Process) operating throughout the country, which are the successors of the Resource Centers established in 2006. These state structures are subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Science, and there is one in each district. The regional teams for the support of children and students with SEN are formed in the Center. They include resource teachers, special educators, psychologists, speech therapists and other specialists as needed, as well as representatives of regional education departments.

Based on the assessment of the kindergarten or school team, it is they who propose to the director of the RCSIEP whether to approve / disapprove the additional support. If the kindergarten or school cannot form a team, the team is formed by the RCSIEP and they carry out the evaluation. They also re-evaluate in cases where the parent does not agree with the evaluation or with the proposed additional support. These teams provide methodological support for working with children and students with special educational needs in kindergartens, schools and personal development support centers.

Up to 3 children with special needs can study in a group in a kindergarten or in a school class. Should there be an increase in number, an assistant teacher can be appointed – this is a recently introduced measure in the country. The figure is a paraprofessional. A teacher's assistant is provided when there are more than 3 children or students with special educational needs in a kindergarten group or in a school class, when children and students have complex needs due to emotional and behavioral problems with autism spectrum disorder. For the time being, the practice of hiring these specialists is limited, as it is a recently introduced opportunity which also requires financial allocation from the educational institution's budget.

Financing

The activities in the system of pre-school and school education are financed with funds from the state budget, municipal budgets, European funds and programs and other sources. The state budget funds are allocated among the budgets of the municipalities financing state and municipal schools and kindergartens, based on the number of children and

students and a standard for a child and a student, determined for the respective year. Since 2018, new rules for the financing of kindergartens and schools have been put in place, that take into consideration not only the number of students, but also other characteristics of the educational institutions. These include the region in which the kindergarten or school is located and the number of children from vulnerable groups. Schools in small, remote and border areas receive higher funding. Targeted funds are also allocated to kindergartens and schools with a concentration of students at risk. These measures aim to improve access to education and to reduce school dropouts.

The funds for children and students who receive resource support are determined by regulations and are distributed between kindergartens and schools according to the number of children and students benefiting from resource support. When the resource support is not provided by the kindergarten or the school, the municipality provides the funds either to a center for the support of personal development, to a center for special educational support or to a regional center for the support of inclusive educational processes.

Interfaces between education and Health systems within Inclusive education

The main normative document regulating the functioning of the national health insurance system in Bulgaria is the Health Insurance Act (2009), and the National Health Strategy 2020 is the leading strategic document that specified the goals for the development of the health care system by 2020. It is in line with Bulgaria's commitments at a European and international level, but also embodies the state's desire to choose a national path of development for the healthcare system.

The education and health systems intersect at the level of identifying the special needs of children and the need for support. The provision of additional support to children with SEN is based on an individual needs assessment. For its implementation the parent submits documents to the director of the school, incl. statuses from any preliminary examinations and consultations conducted – psychological, speech therapy, medical, as well as medical documentation certifying the child's health conditions.

There are Territorial Expert Medical Commissions (TEMCs) in Bulgaria, which certify children and persons as regards permanent incapacity to work/type and degree of disability. The preparation of children/people with disabilities who need to appear before the TEMC commissions is carried out by their GPs (General Practitioners/physicians). They

determine the medical documents, examinations, consultations and tests that the person needs, and also give them a medical referral for the TEMC. Subsequently the patient goes to the relevant commission according to their place of residence. In order to fulfill its task of evaluating inpatients, the TEMC conducts home visits on a regional basis, i.e. within the respective district, while the National Expert Medical Commission (NEMC) conducts home visits throughout the country. People with health insurance do not pay for the examinations and consultations prescribed by the personal doctor or the specialist for the purposes of the medical evaluation. The NEMC is the body before which the expert decisions issued by the TEMC are appealed.

Children/people with disabilities for whom the TEMC decides so, are entitled to monthly benefits for care of a child with disabilities, regardless of family income, are entitled to personal and social assistants, and social assistants can accompany children to schools.

According to the Education Act (PSEA, 2016), health care is part of the general support for personal development provided to all children and students. Health care is granted by guaranteeing children and students access to medical care and programs for health education and a healthy lifestyle. Health offices function in kindergartens and schools and their functioning is regulated by the Health Act.

Bulgaria is still among the countries in the EU with the least general practitioners *per capita*. At the end of 2019, according to the National Statistical Institute (NSI), there were 1,416 pediatricians, which means that on average one pediatrician has to care for approximately 900 children. In many of the schools, the health offices are served mostly by nurses, and doctors are most often contracted for certain hours of the week.

The additional support provided to the student with SEN is determined in the *Individual Support Plan*. It may include rehabilitation activities, such as: psycho-social rehabilitation, hearing and speech rehabilitation, visual rehabilitation, rehabilitation of communication disorders and physical disabilities. The Ordinance on Inclusive Education (2017)⁵ stipulates that the Rehabilitation of Communication Disorders can also be carried out in cooperation with specialists from medical institutions. As for children and students with physical disabilities (musculo-skeletal disorders), they may be provided with rehabilitation and kine-

⁵ The Ordinance on Inclusive Education (2017) regulates the public relations related to provision of inclusive education for children and students in the system of pre – school and school education as well as the activities of the institutions in this system to provide support for the personal development of children and students.

sitherapy during physical education and sports classes by a rehabilitator and/or kinesi therapist, or provided with therapeutic exercise. However, in rare cases such specialists have been appointed in the Centers for Special Educational Support, and are completely absent in schools. Children and students are required to use other services offered by the community – health or social facilities, which have appointed rehabilitators/physiotherapists.

Interfaces between education and social systems within inclusive education

A series of changes are being made as a result of an entirely new Persons with Disabilities Act adopted and in force since January 1, 2019⁶. The Act creates conditions for the implementation of the priorities set out in the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities and formulated in accordance with the European Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2010-2020, It expresses a renewed commitment to a barrier-free Europe. The Law's strategic goal is to provide the necessary and adequate socio-economic support for people with disabilities in order to achieve their full inclusion into society.

The new legislation guarantees equal and full exercise of the rights of people with disabilities. The areas and means for the necessary support for social inclusion are defined in a new way. Principles are introduced that determine personal choice, independence, equality, accessibility, full and effective participation in the public life of people with disabilities and their families.

The law addresses support for social inclusion - medical, vocational, social, labor and psychological rehabilitation, education and vocational training, employment, accessible environment and reasonable accommodations, accessible information and personal mobility, access to justice and legal protection, financial support, information system and registers.

The law also addresses the issue of education and vocational training in connection with the exercise of the rights of children and students with disabilities, including those with SEN, to “provide support for personal development in the preschool and school education system”. Here is the interface with the Education Act (PSEA, 2016).

The law corresponds to the Ordinance on Inclusive Education (in force since 27 October 2017), which sets the state educational standard

⁶ The Persons with Disabilities Act (PDA) was approved on 18 December 2018. It has been enforced since 1 January 2019 and replaces the Law on the Integration of Persons with Disabilities (2005).

for inclusive education. The ordinance also regulates public relations related to the provision of inclusive education for children and students in the system of preschool and school education, as well as the activities of institutions in this system to provide support for personal development of children and students.

Support for the personal development of children and students is organized and provided in accordance with the relevant approved regional and municipal strategies and based on an analysis of the needs for general and additional support. Personal development support is provided in accordance with the individual educational needs of each child and each student.

As part of the Ordinance on Inclusive Education, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labor and Social Policy have approved an Algorithm of interaction between institutions in the preschool education system and the Social Assistance Directorates regarding the provision of support for the personal development of children and students.

The Child Protection Act of 13 June 2000 regulates the rights, principles and measures for *child protection*, state and municipal bodies and their interaction in carrying out child protection activities, as well as the participation of legal entities and individuals in such activities. The state protects and guarantees the basic rights of children in Bulgaria, regardless of their age, social status, physical, health and mental condition. All children are provided with an appropriate economic, social and cultural environment, education, freedom of opinion and security.

At the suggestion of the Council of Ministers, the National Assembly adopts a National Strategy for the Child, based on the principles of this law. In pursuance of the national strategy, the Council of Ministers adopts a National Program for Child Protection (2015), proposed by the Minister of Labor and Social Policy and the Chairman of the State Agency for Child Protection. Thus, the State bodies, within their competence, conduct the state policy for child protection and create appropriate conditions for its development.

At a national level, actions were taken for reforms in the social services sector and a new Social Services Act⁷ was developed and adopted, made

⁷ The law enables social services to be provided to any person who needs support to prevent or overcome social exclusion, enforce their rights or improve their quality of life. The new regulations in the Social Services Act focus mainly on assistance services, defining their content and describing the functions of the assistant. The law also states that a right to assistance will be given to the elderly who cannot take care of themselves and to other people in need of assistance. Municipalities undertake to organise the provision of assistance in a way that allows for the complex provision of different types of so-

effective as from 1 July 2020. The law regulates the provision, use, planning, financing, quality, control and monitoring of social services in the Republic of Bulgaria. It is important to note that a wide range of stakeholders took part in the process of consulting the law, including representatives of non-governmental organizations, social partners, academia and others.

The law regulates public relations related to the exercise of the rights of people with disabilities in the Republic of Bulgaria and aims to: promote, protect and guarantee the full and equal exercise of the rights and freedoms of people with disabilities; create conditions for social inclusion of people with disabilities; contribute to respecting the inherent human dignity of people with disabilities; provide support for people with disabilities and their families. The law guarantees the rights of people with disabilities in a way that ensures respect for their human dignity and equal treatment in their personal, public and political lives, applying an individual approach and individual needs assessment. According to the concept of the law, services must support the overall improvement of the quality of life.

The Social Services Act regulates and emphasizes the integrated provision of support not only through social services, but also through services from different systems. Coordination mechanisms for integrated support from different systems, social work in other systems, as well as support from other systems, facilitate interaction. It is possible to perform social work not only in places where social services are provided, but also in other environments – for example in hospitals, schools, centers for children in conflict with the law and others.

All this implies modernization and development of the cross-sectoral partnerships and social inclusion services. It is important to achieve synchronization of the vision for the management of the processes of per-

cial service in the home environment. The assistant helps the person who is using the service to cope with everyday life – assists him/her in their home environment, or accompanies him/her to a hospital, or an institution. The Law establishes a new Agency for the Quality of Social Services at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, which should be operational as of 2020. The new structure will monitor how municipalities and private providers spend state funds. It will verify compliance with the rights of users of social services, monitor national performance and license all private providers of social services. It will create common standards for providers but, at the same time, will give them the freedom to develop their own practices and relationships between professionals, children and parents, since the system was previously highly restricted by methodological guidelines (BOGDANOV G. - ZAHARIEV B., *European Social Policy Network, New Social Services Act finally adopted in Bulgaria*, European Commission, ESPN Flash Report 2019/37).

sonal development of children and students at all levels – municipal, regional and national, as well as between participants and stakeholders in the process of its provision, because achieving goals is possible only when the efforts of all stakeholders come together.

Interaction and interconnection in the fields of education, healthcare and social services in achieving common goals for social inclusion is the most important condition for improving access to quality social, health, educational services, leading to inclusive education for all.

Inclusive education in Bulgaria: the view of professionals and parents

In the course of the research⁸ 2 unstructured interviews with specialists from social services for children and 2 structured interviews with parents of children with special needs were conducted.

The interviews with the specialists reveal the practical interaction between the different systems and services. Almost 100% of children receiving assistance from social services of ages 3 and above are enrolled in the education system. Experts report isolated cases of children who are not enrolled at this stage. The majority of children attend classes in kindergarten or school. There are children who receive their education within the daycare center, “through an individual form of training with a teacher. These are children with complex needs for whom schools do not have a prepared environment and the opportunity to accept them”.

Experts share the fact that there are children who visit kindergartens half a day or for an hour. It is also a fact that many of the families we work with have to change kindergartens more than once due to the child’s difficult adaptation or unpreparedness of the staff. Sometimes parents of other children in the group insist that the child be moved ... Often parents hear comments such as: “keep your child at home for a few days, if possible”, “he does not take an afternoon nap and disturbs other children, come and get him” and the like.

However, specialists report relatively good interaction with the kindergartens and attribute this to the fact that they, as well as the services they provide, are municipally delegated activities and the local municipal leadership is very active in some areas.

⁸ The interviews were conducted in the period October-November 2020 and aimed to shed light on how inclusive education happens in Bulgaria in practice and how the educational, social and health systems interact in relation to the children with disabilities on a institutional level.

Some 10 years ago the country witnessed the introduction of the family-centered approach to Early Intervention Services in the non-governmental sector. “The transition of a child from a family to a social community usually engages the whole family. For the families of children with special needs, this is in full force”. Therapists not only carry out direct therapeutic activities with the child, but also consult and train parents and other members of extended families. “Families are supported in how to develop the potential of their children, to teach them independence and in a confident way. We support families in building routines and daily skills for children. We teach children social and communication skills in a group. Where necessary, we introduce alternative and augmentative communication”.

The family is the main driving force in the child's therapy

Professionals report that it is a matter of systematic policy and specific activities on behalf of the municipality as well as the team of the social services, teachers and parents, that children should feel part of their peer group in the education system. “In the best case, activities from both systems are carried out in parallel: specialists from the Day Care Center for Children with Disabilities prepare the child for inclusion in the education system, and teachers prepare other children and their parents for the child with special needs. The individual approach and consideration for each child is very important, planning a smooth transition to provide a good learning environment for all children, as well as the partnership between therapist/specialist, parent and teacher. At the same time, information campaigns, initiatives and events are systematically conducted aimed at informing the local community about the children with special needs, the meaning of inclusion and the benefits for all parties. If 10 or more years ago this was a very distant topic, now a large part of these initiatives come from teachers and children in the education system”.

Unfortunately, there are many examples where children are not involved in the overall learning and playing process. “The problems are many and varied – for example, from the lack of understanding of the individual specifics of nutrition and toilet, accompanying the condition of some children, to difficulties in dealing with unacceptable behavior in the group, typical of other children”. Barriers such as the high number of children in groups and classes are a hindrance to the inclusion of children – often up to 30-35 children – alongside the lack of a teacher's assistant, insufficient practical training and supervision, with teacher qualifications playing a crucial role.

“Specially prepared support environment and qualified staff are among the most important elements contributing to the good performance of children”, said experts.

Regarding the supportive environment, a psychologist shares: “My favorite question: There are some nesting puzzles ... Imagine that you have such a puzzle that has holes only for circles, but you hold circles, squares and triangles in your hands. Whatever you do with these elements, they will not be ‘embedded’ until you change something on the board. It’s the same with children – to reach their full potential, all children need a supportive environment. In our country, the processes of changing the environment in the education system are in place, but we still have a long way to go. The supportive environment is much more than a physical and resource environment. It is above all a philosophy, a culture, an acceptance of difference and diversity, an adequate response to the needs of the child”.

“Children easily accept differences, as long as they are explained in an accessible, playful way – they are usually understanding and accepting, especially at an early age. But in order for the pedagogue / psychologist in the kindergarten to teach respect for differences, he/she must have an adequate understanding of differences. There are still many people in our country who do not know and do not use a language that respects the individual. Due to ignorance of the correct words and terms, offensive, segregating ones are used. It’s a matter of information”.

Professionals say: “Many of the children we work with receive general or additional support in kindergarten. In most cases, it consists in providing material and educational resources, as well as conducting additional therapeutic sessions with specialists (psychologists, speech therapists, resource teachers, etc.) in kindergarten. However, this support is provided within the class activity only in rare cases. The parents we work with say that their children rarely have adapted materials for each activity”. The fact that a well-prepared supportive environment is not available everywhere is still a serious challenge in the education system.

An important moment in the child’s development is his/her transition from a family environment to support services and from kindergarten to school. “We strive to reach children with special needs from an early age. With the provision of social services, children initially work in an individual environment, gradually transferring skills to a small group and in the family environment, and subsequently in kindergarten. We provide guidance to teachers and we are available to support them in the

inclusion process. Often the inclusion happens concurrently in social and educational services, but the most important thing is to keep in touch and partner with parents, professionals and teachers. We encourage, promote good partnerships and strive to attract more parents and teachers as supporters”.

Professionals say they have always aimed at building cooperation with specialists and teachers from kindergartens, noting that in “most cases this happens”. They share the good practice of having meetings attended by the children’s parents. “Sometimes we invite kindergarten professionals to our individual or group sessions, and then we discuss therapeutic techniques and strategies for inclusion in a group that work for the child, and we strive to unify our approaches”.

The additional qualification of teachers and their support in the form of practical training, individual or group supervision on a case-by-case basis is important, and to this end it is good to seek assistance from competent training organizations with opportunities to share practical experience. As for interaction with the healthcare system, specialists still see many gaps, misunderstandings and a poorly functioning mechanism: “At the moment, we are talking more about cooperation. In most cases, pediatricians provide us with information about children and assist in the need for referral to specialized clinics. We have several cases of children with special needs referred to our service by GPs”.

“The services we provide, such as physiotherapy and rehabilitation for children, psychological counseling for parents, are not funded by the health care system. We cooperate in referring children to diagnostic units and teams; we take on cases referred to us by pediatricians and general practitioners; we conduct information campaigns in maternity hospitals; in certain cases specialists in early childhood intervention consult mothers in maternity wards in the city of Varna. The training events and conferences we organize are often attended by representatives of Medical Universities”.

The role of the kindergarten/school, as well as of the health professionals and their role in the process of inclusion is seen by the specialists as follows: “We all are the support network around the child – the strength of each unit is complemented by close partnership and cooperation”.

A director at a Daycare Centre for Children with Special Needs states: “Each of the systems – health, social and educational, is of great importance to ensure the best interests of every child, including their inclusion.

When we speak of a holistic approach, we mean just that – only active partnership and taking on specific responsibilities, according to the specific child and family, will lead to the best result. Health care and treatment should be carried out in parallel with specialist therapy and teaching”.

Specialists who work with the child and the family play an important role in empowering parents. They declare: “Regarding the therapy of children in our center, the parent is an active participant. We strive to develop the potential of both the child and his/her parents. They participate in the discussion of their children’s therapeutic plans, attend the therapeutic sessions, develop sensitivity to the specific needs of the child, we support them to feel calm and confident in their parenting role. This makes them much more aware and responsive to the child’s needs during adaptation to kindergarten/school”. Parents become advocates for their children as they develop “their confidence, acceptance of the child’s condition and awareness of their needs”. “Parents are becoming more aware of and protecting their children’s rights – social payments, use of aids, social services, tax deductions, personal assistance, education and more”.

Specialists acknowledge the changes and efforts made by the state towards inclusive education: “The result of legislative changes in recent years is the commitment of the education system to search for and enroll children with special needs in schools and kindergartens. The attitudes of teachers and parents of other children are gradually changing. There are more and more examples in which teachers prepare for this process, gather information about the child, inform other parents and create a favorable climate. There are still difficulties in including children with autism spectrum diagnoses, children with complex needs and children with challenging behaviors. In my opinion, the education system is not ready to accept these children in terms of an inclusive environment and the qualification of teachers. Support and assistance is available from the municipal leadership for the development of the systems, for the change of attitudes, and for staff qualification. There is an overall striving for usefulness, efficiency, provision of quality and timely social and educational services”.

Specialists would like to see more changes in the intersectoral cooperation between the educational, social and health ministries, in order to facilitate the process of inclusion of children and students. They believe that in order to be effective, the intersectoral cooperation between the structures of the three ministries will be more effective if, in addition to the changes in the legal framework, there is a written and

effective mechanism at a national level. The responsibilities of each structure, the way of interaction with other structures, as well as control over their implementation should be clearly and categorically stated there. In recent years, many initiatives and projects have been implemented, both by the state authorities and the non-governmental sector, which have undoubtedly yielded positive results. They should be supported by a clear state policy, with a specific coordination mechanism”.

The current mechanisms in Bulgaria for funding and providing activities for therapy, rehabilitation and social inclusion of children with special needs by the state are distributed among these three ministries, as well as various municipal projects and services at a local level, the non-governmental sector, private organizations and other providers. As a result, the end user – the child, and consequently the family, often uses services that are inconsistent with each other. And here we are not just talking about overlapping services – measures have been taken in this regard. The lack of coordination at an institutional level unfortunately leads to the lack of a holistic approach towards the end user. Another major problem is the early identification of child development disorders and the timely referral to early childhood intervention programs. There needs to be a national focal point that brings together all service providers. This would allow the child to be placed in the center and to build the necessary support network around him/her. And this should be valid for every child, regardless of the condition, location, social and financial status of the family and other factors”.

From the interviews with parents, the point of view of the users becomes clear. It is diverse, given the experience of families in interacting with social services and the education system. One parent told us: “Depending on the child’s diagnosis and condition, there are also quite conflicting opinions about inclusive education. One such example is the child’s desire to attend kindergarten – one child will attend willingly and feel ‘happy’ according to the mother, while the other child will prefer to stay at home, because the staff at kindergarten is much stricter towards him and it bothers him”.

Parents describe their interaction with teachers as “effective”. It is mainly expressed in conversations and receiving advice from them, providing ideas to facilitate the education. “However, sometimes I am left with the feeling that not enough attention is paid to my child”. One of the mothers also shared that before she started visiting the kindergarten, “the class teachers and the assistant teacher contacted me to set up a meeting where I could tell them about the daily routines, habits,

abilities, specific characteristics of my child”. According to parents, a supportive environment is important for the good performance of their children. In some cases, the age of teachers also plays a role in motivating them to change the environment, introduce innovations and new approaches. Initially, parents rely heavily on the additional support that psychologists and speech therapists provide to their children in kindergarten, but it is extremely insufficient – once or twice a week for 20 minutes, forcing them to look for other alternatives in the community. There is an individual support plan for the child, but the parents do not take part in the planning, but rather are informed about the set goals and objectives. As parents have had the opportunity to use different types of therapeutic services, they have a basis for comparison in terms of attitudes, quality of services and influencing the development of their children. The interaction between the sectors offers more opportunities to provide therapeutic services for children in kindergarten without disrupting the educational process. Where necessary, parents want to be able to rely on “an adequate assessment of the child’s needs”.

In general, parents declare their readiness to advocate for the rights of their children, especially “in case my child does not have a chance to develop like all other children due to their special needs”.

Challenges in Bulgaria

It is possible to point out some critical points that the Bulgarian system must deal with in the next years to improve a better conditions for SEN students.

- There is no unified information system/register for children with disabilities and a diagnostic center at a national level.
- There is no structured information about the path that families of children with disabilities have to take in the diagnosis process and in receiving support. Often the support is neither adequate nor timely.
- Services for children with disabilities are often provided only to the child and do not involve the family.
- There is a need to increase the knowledge and skills of general education teachers to work with children and students with special educational needs so that they feel sufficiently prepared to support children with SEN in the classroom in a systematic and quality way. Changing existing attitudes that working with children with SEN is a highly expert profession and should be performed by the resource teacher or other resource specialist.

- There is a shortage of specialists, services and support for children living in small settlements far from the regional cities. Families need to travel long distances to receive the support they need.

- Financial security, defined by the single cost standard, does not cover all needs for inclusive education. Additional sources of funding need to be sought.

- Additional specialized training of teachers and coordinating teams is needed for early and timely identification of the needs for additional support for each child or student

- Although there is an Algorithm of interaction between the institutions in the system of preschool and school education and the Social assistance directorates in terms of support for personal development of children and students, it is necessary to build a more complete and effective mechanism for efficient cooperation between all institutions involved when it comes to children with special needs and their families, in order to support the development and participation of the child and the well-being of the family.

- There is no a widespread information campaign for the interaction between the institutions from the different systems regarding the aspect of educational and social inclusion, yet there is such a need for one due to the rapid changes in the legislation in recent years and the consecutive changes and additions.

Recommendations for good European practices that can be introduced in Bulgaria

It is necessary stress some points useful to promote policy, culture and good practices in inclusive and special education in Bulgaria:

- To establish a Monitoring Commission to facilitate the process of interaction between the structures of MES (Ministry of Education and Science), MLSP (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy), MH (Ministry of Health), which will include employees from the three ministries and experts.

- To prepare a “Roadmap” for the path of the child and family from birth to completion of education with opportunities for screening at several stages in early childhood, early diagnosis, developmental assessment, health, general and additional support for personal development, ensuring full social inclusion based on the rights of children and people with disabilities.

- To regulate and connect in a single system regional diagnostic center at medical institutions, which in addition to medical specialists/psychia-

trists, neurologists, orthopedists, etc./, include psychologists, speech therapists, special teachers, physical therapists, occupational therapists, social workers and others.

- To create a National Unified Information System/Register for Children with Disabilities, for monitoring the child's entire period of development/0-18 years/and the family.

- To use a holistic approach to the child, consistent with the individual strengths and abilities of children, which prepares the child to realize himself/herself well as an adult. The advantage is that it is not focused only on academic performance, but considers the possibilities for realization of the individual in various aspects of life.

- To introduce a family-centered approach in the educational, social and health system.

- To ensure continuity between institutions in the transition of each child from one place to another. Provide ongoing support for each child throughout the developmental period.

- To encourage a policy aimed at opportunities and incentives to encourage an effective policy aimed at opportunities and incentives for parents.

- To look for opportunities for coverage providing additional support and therapeutic services for children from remote and small towns and villages. For example, through mobile services – not only through the Regional Centers which could provide additional support in kindergartens and schools, but by giving the opportunity for contracting at a municipal or district level with social service providers who have the necessary licensed specialists, and can provide additional support for children with SEN by offering it as a mobile service.

- To have a broad national information campaign to clarify the relationship between the three ministries in Bulgaria in connection with educational and social inclusion, led by a team of experts from all the three ministries.

- To use a comprehensive broad definition of inclusion and special needs, common to all legislative areas

REFERENCES

BENJAMIN T., *Participation in early childhood educational environments for young children with and without developmental delays: a mixed methods study*, Colorado State University, 2014.

BOGDANOV G. - ZAHARIEV B., *New Social Services Act finally adopted in Bulgaria*, file:///C:/Users/Magdalena/Downloads/ESPN%20-%20Flash%20report%202019%20-%2037%20-%20BG%20-%20July%202019.pdf.

DONCHEVA J. (2020), *Fostering a Developmental Educational and Creative Environment for Children with Special Educational Needs in the Bulgarian Inclusive Education*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346403674_Fostering_a_Developmental_Educational_and_Creative_Environment_for_Children_with_Special_Educational_Needs_in_the_Bulgarian_Inclusive_Education.

DONCHEVA J. (2022), *Angel Kanchev University of Ruse, Effective interaction between teachers and parents in the process of inclusive education*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361115960_Effective_interaction_between_teachers_and_parents_in_the_process_of_inclusive_education_Efektivno_vzaimodejstvie_mezdu_pedagogiceskite_specialisti_i_roditelite_v_procesa_na_priobsavasoto_obrazovanie.

EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, *Country information gathering template prepared for the Global Education Monitoring Report 2021*, <https://gem-report-2020.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Bulgaria.pdf>.

GEORGIEVA N. (2019), *Inclusive education in bulgaria: successes and challenges. Knowledge*, in «International Journal», 30, 2, pp. 321-326, <https://doi.org/10.35120/kij3002321g>.

MINEVA-DIMITROVA E. (2019), *The current state of inclusive education in higher education system of Bulgaria*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331645796_THE_CURRENT_STATE_OF_INCLUSIVE_EDUCATION_IN_HIGHER_EDUCATION_SYSTEM_OF_BULGARIA.

OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, Bulgaria, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/81d18411-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/81d18411-en>.

SCANLON G. - RADEVA - PITISIA V. - MAGUIRE - NIKOLAEVA S. (2022), *Attitudes of teachers in Bulgarian kindergartens towards inclusive education*, in «Teaching and Teacher Education», 112, April 2022, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0742051X2200021X>.

ШАРКОВА-ТАНЕВА П. (2018), *Approaches for therapy and education of children with sen in new realities in Bulgaria*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335226069_APPROACHES_FOR_THERAPY_AND_EDUCATION_OF_CHILDREN_WITH_SEN_IN_NEW_REALITIES_IN_BULGARIA.

ВАЛЯВИЧАРСКА МАРИЯ (2021), *Приобщаващото образование в България – нагласи, възприемане, предразсъдъци*, Издателство ISM Company.

ДАМЯНОВ К. (2022), *Приобщаващо образование и организация на подкрепяща среда*.

Данни за децата с увреждания в България и по света, Как могат да бъдат преодолени предизвикателствата./ Data on the children with disabilities in Bulgaria and around the world. *How to overcome the challenges, UNICEF Bulgaria.*

Евгениева Емилия (2020), Приобщаващо образование – иновации и парадокси, Издателство на БАН „Проф. Марин Дринов“.

Макинтайър К. - П. Депонио (2015), Идентифициране и подкрепа на деца със специфични обучителни трудности.

Матанова В. - Тодорова Е. (2013), Ръководство за прилагане на методика за оценка на образователните потребности на децата и учениците. Институт за психично здраве и развитие, София.

Приобщаващо образование в детската градина - CD (2019), РАабс.

Приобщаващо образование – казуси от училищната практика (2020), РАабс България.

Цветкова - Арсова М. (2015), Педагогика на деца и ученици с множество увреждания, София.

Чавдарова-Костова Сийка (2019), Приобщаващо образование, УИ „Св. Климент Охридски“.

Legislation and policy definitions linked to key concepts within inclusive education systems

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Bulgaria- Legislation and Policy, <https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/bulgaria/legislation-and-policy>.

European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, https://www.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/C_02_Strategia_europea_disabilita_eng.pdf.

European Disability Strategy Strategy for the Rights of persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_810.

International Labour Organization, Elimination of Child Labour, Protection of Children and Young Person, Act 31 May 2000, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=56706&p_country=BGR&p_count=1373&p_classification=04&p_classcount=30.

Law on pre-school and school Education, 01.08.2016, <https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136641509>.

Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Preschool and School Education, Decree No. 185, 15-09-2020, <https://dv.parliament.bg/DVWeb/show-MaterialDV.jsp?jsessionid=6F044BE97E4F956A7800FF72CDEF6875?idMat=151650>.

Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Preschool and School Education, Decree No. 26, 31-01-2023, <https://dv.parliament.bg/DVWeb/showMaterialDV.jsp?sessionId=5BD74B1A70E267F2060573E67155206A?idMat=185401>.

Law on Social Services, 01-07-2020, <https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2137191914>.

Law on Health Insurance, 07-05-1999, <https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2134412800>.

Health Law, 01-01-2005, <https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2135489147>.

Law on the budget of the National Health Insurance Fund for 2022, 01-01-2022, in [ex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2137220479](https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2137220479).

Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Agency for People with Disabilities, <https://ahu.mlsp.government.bg/home/>.

Ministry of labour and Social Policy, Child Protection, <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/eng/child-protection>.

Ordinance on Inclusive Education, Effective from 27-10-2017, Adopted by PMS No. 232 of 20-10-2017, <https://lex.bg/en/laws/ldoc/2137177670>.

2.4. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Lenka Krejčová⁹, Daniela Pokorná¹⁰, Jana Pechancová¹¹

Legislation

The inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) is covered by the School Law which was passed in 2004. It has been updated almost every year since its approval. In 2016 article no. 16 of the School Law was modified. This article regards pupils and students with SEN. Since 2016 all children and adolescents with SEN have the right to attend (to be included in) standard local schools. Before 2016 some children with SEN traditionally had gone to specialized schools for children with diverse disabilities. There were schools for pupils with sensory impairment, motor impairment, mental disabilities, etc. Such schools still exist and a lot pupils attend them. However, according to the Law local schools cannot deny pupils and students with special needs providing their parents require their children's admittance into the school. Specialised schools are no longer the first schooling option as often used to be the case. In other words, pupils with special needs often commuted

⁹ Psychologist and coordinator DYS Centrum, Praha, Czech Republic.

¹⁰ Psychologist DYS Centrum, Praha, Czech Republic.

¹¹ Psychologist and pedagogist DYS Centrum, Praha, Czech Republic.