**Measures for the integration or inclusion of children with special educational needs in Slovenia**

**Report from Slovenia**

On SIESC’s request Vanja Kiswarday from Primorska University sent some personal remarks and the Country Report and Country Study Visit Report prepared within the last year project with the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

Regarding the situation about inclusion of children with special needs in Slovenia (regulations and numbers) you can find quite detailed information in the Country Report and Country Study Visit Report that we prepared within the last year project with the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. In the elementary schools (1st - 9th grade) we have 5,6% pupils that have got an official decision due to their special needs. They have the right for individualised education, some accommodations and additional professional help (up to 5 hours per week). Our school regulation allows all kinds of adaptations, but the standards are set and cannot be lowered – that’s why children with severe learning disabilities do not have a right to inclusive education – so we have special schools with lower educational standards. We have different special pedagogical profiles that support education of children with special needs (inclusive pedagogues, special pedagogues, social pedagogues, logopaeds) that work with a child either inside the class or in individual situations. … You can read more about it in the attached documents.

**Selected passages from the Country Report**

A milestone in **inclusive education in Slovenia** was the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2000), hereafter referred to as the Placement Act, that was put in place in 2000. Before this, Slovenia had a segregated, two-trailed education system. The institutional education and care for children with special educational needs (SEN) started at the beginning of the 20th century and grew into a in highly professional special education model. The department of special pedagogy at the University of Ljubljana’s Academy of Education, established in 1949, was responsible for the initial training of special education teachers. The most extensive segregation effect was registered between 1975 and 1977, when as many as 6–8% of the whole school population was educated in special schools and institutions (Galeša, 2003; Opara et al., 2010). There was a special school for children with learning disabilities in almost every municipality, treatment schools for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, three institutions for deaf children and children with hearing and speech disabilities, two for blind and partially-sighted children and two for children with physical disabilities. The first document to put forward a conceptual framework for a change towards more inclusive education was the White Paper on Education (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 1995). Combined with the Placement Act in 2000, the way to mainstream education was formally opened to children with SEN. Without exception, and in accordance with the Placement Act, all educational legislation at all education levels, from pre-primary to university, had to include provisions for children and adolescents with SEN. The concept of a two-track school system started to give way to the establishment of a more just and comprehensive school system. (Country Report, p.4)

**Education for children and young people with special needs** is provided as a public service, but may also be provided in private kindergartens and schools without concessions or in private institutions or as home education. There are many parallel forms (inclusive, integrated form or separate classes and specialised institutions) which meet different needs. All educational programmes for learners with SEN have to follow the main curricular aims that are established by the Ministry in Article 9 of the Organization and Financing of Education Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 1996). According to current legislation, learners with SEN are placed into a continuum of educational programmes, which all are part of the integral school system. The Placement Act defines all the necessary procedures for the placement of learners with SEN in all types of education, from pre-primary to upper-secondary. Depending on the learner’s psychological and physical status, the Placement Act enables inclusion in the most appropriate educational programme, based on the assumption that additional professional help and adapted implementation of programmes will help a learner to achieve a comparable standard of knowledge. If a learner’s special needs are severe or complex and it is not possible to provide a suitable environment in a mainstream kindergarten or school, the learner is placed in an adapted programme at a specialised institution. This allows learners to reach a standard of knowledge equal to that of their peers in mainstream schools. Furthermore, some institutions implement an adapted basic school programme with a lower educational standard and a special curriculum for learners with an intellectual disability in addition to the primary disability. If learners live at a distance and daily commuting to and from an institution is not an option, they may reside in the institution free of charge. (Country Report, p.6)

**Financial support for families of learners with special educational needs**

Families and learners with SEN are entitled to special financial support from the government. The government provides funding for the placement of learners with SEN for the following:

• aids, equipment and adjustments to classrooms to accommodate learners’ needs;

• carers who accompany learners with physical disabilities;

• boarding fees in dormitories;

•specialised textbooks;

•transportation of parents and their children during holidays;

•a higher proportion of partial funding for after-hours programmes and for an improved learner to teacher ratio.

The Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia ensures the provision of medical-technical aids to learners with SEN. Technical aids are prescribed by an authorised medical doctor. The insurance company regulations specify which aids and standard support tools are provided to learners. The Institute of Rehabilitation of the Republic of Slovenia supports the adjustment to more complex medical-technical tools that require an inter-disciplinary approach and the parents and learners to familiarise themselves with their use (e.g. complex wheelchairs, communicators, etc.). Learners with special needs must be offered free transportation to and from school, if this is stated in their guidance order (Basic School Act). The refund of relevant costs is the responsibility of the local community (Source: Eurydice Slovenia). (Country Report, p. 10f.)

The twelve **key aims and principles** are highlighted in Article 4 of the Placement Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2000; 2011b) and guide educational institutions towards assuring:

1. The best benefit for the learner;

2. Consistency and complexity of education;

3. Equal opportunities, while taking into account learners’ diversity;

4. Parent or guardian involvement in the process of guidance and further education and all forms of assistance;

5. An individualised approach;

6. Inter-disciplinarity;

7. Maintaining the balance between the different areas of a learner’s physical and mental development;

8. Guidance to the most suitable education programme as soon as possible;

9. Immediate and continuous support and professional assistance in educational programmes;

10. Vertical permeability and connectivity of programmes;

11. Organisation of education and training as close to the place of residence as possible;

12. Providing adequate conditions that allow optimal development of each learner.

By ensuring the achievement of the above objectives and principles, the renewed system of education began to become a more qualitative and inclusive learning environment for all learners. Inclusion is thus a reciprocal process that enriches and promotes personal development, as it requires the empathic vigilance of the individual and of the society. With a tendency towards social cohesion, mutual care, looking for common good and removing obstacles, it promotes diverse and multisensory learning, creativity and progress both in education and in society in general. (Country Report, p. 14)

In the **Placement of Children with Special Needs Act** (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2000), the classification of learners based solely on specific disabilities was suspended. The emphasis was placed rather on the learners’ needs and this formed the concept of the integration model of education. It redefined learners who need adaptations and/or assistance in the education process. If the assistance and adaptations cannot be provided by mainstream kindergartens or schools, the learner’s needs are identified in the placement procedure and the learner is placed into a suitably adapted programme. These programmes are in special schools or institutions for the education of learners with special needs, or in classes or groups established for this purpose within mainstream kindergartens and schools. The latest Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2011b) defines nine groups of learners with SEN who need more provisions and resources to support their learning as follows:

1. Learners with intellectual disabilities;

2. Blind learners and learners with visual impairments;

3. Deaf learners and learners with hearing impairments;

4. Learners with speech problems;

5. Learners with physical disabilities;

6. Learners with long-term illnesses;

7. Learners with deficits in individual learning areas;

8. Learners with emotional and behavioural disorders;

9. Learners with autistic disorders.

Learners are recognised as having SEN when they get an official decision by the **National Education Institute Slovenia** (NEIS). Parents usually request the introduction of official guidance procedures for learners with SEN, but schools or learners themselves (from15 years old) can also request it.

The **Commission for Guidance of Children with SEN**, founded by NEIS, are responsible for the placement. They are working according to the Regulations for the organisation and work of the commissions for guidance of children with SEN (Official Gazette No. 88/13), and Criteria for the assessment of the type and degree of disadvantage, impairments and disabilities of learners with SEN (NEIS, 2015a). The Commission is appointed depending on the type of disability and consists of at least three members: a special pedagogue in the appropriate field, a psychologist, and a specialist paediatrician. (Country Report, p. 15f.)

The Commission delivers an **Expert Opinion**, which encompasses basic information about the learner, synthesis of opinions of all members, the type and degree of disability, they also establish the placement proposal into the most appropriate programme and school or institution. If necessary, the commission specifies the extent, type and professionals for additional professional support (APS), the adjustments of rooms and equipment, assistants for physically impaired learners, aids and other learner’s rights according to the law, etc. Based on the Expert Opinion, NEIS issues the official decision on the placement of the learner with SEN into the most appropriate educational programme, considering a continuum of provided adjustments, help, and APS. Prior to issuing a decision, the NEIS consults parents about the expert opinion and ensures that the school or institution fulfils the admission conditions. The parents may appeal against the decision. (Country Report, p. 16)

The largest **number of placement decisions** was issued to learners with deficits in individual learning areas (36.5%). This group is followed by learners with multiple disabilities (28.7%), learners with long-term illness (10.4%), learners with intellectual disabilities (8.5%), learners with speech and language impairments (7.3%), and learners with limited intellectual capacity (2.5%). This last group has decreased remarkably, as it was excluded as an autonomous group within the Placement Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2000). The groups of learners with physical disabilities, deaf learners and learners with hearing impairments have the same average share (2.3%). Blind and partially-sighted learners and learners with emotional and behaviour disabilities are the smallest groups of learners with SEN, with an average share of less than 1%. Official decisions for children with autism are not yet evident, since they were only recognised as an autonomous group in the Placement Act of 2013. Before this, their official decision was usually issued to them as learners with long-term illness or speech and language impairments. (Country Report, p. 16f.)

The **continuum of educational programmes** in which learners with SEN can be placed

According to learners’ capabilities and needs and the best opportunities to provide optimal forms of support and assistance, the Commission for Guidance selects the optimal educational programme for the child. The programmes are spread over three levels, ranging from full inclusion in mainstream education to inclusion in programmes that are implemented in specialised schools and classes. Most learners with SEN (nearly 98%) attend mainstream kindergartens and schools. The provision of education is adapted to their needs and they are entitled to additional support and assistance (APS) that is provided by teaching staff with specialised skills and special pedagogues (special and social pedagogues, inclusive pedagogues, speech therapists, psychologists, and pedagogues) for a maximum of five hours per week. The approaches and goals that the APS should achieve to enhance inclusive education are set out in the individualised education programmes. These are prepared by a multidisciplinary school team, consisting of teachers, special educators, other school staff involved in the learners’ inclusion, the parents and the learners themselves. They specify the work practices, methods of professional or physical assistance, transfers between programmes and other adjustments necessary to organise, test and assess knowledge, progress through the programme and organise teaching time. (Country Report, p. 22)

**The models of inclusion of children with SEN in basic and upper-secondary education**

In both basic and upper-secondary education, the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act governs the placement of learners with SEN within the education system and lays down the manner and form of education provision. There are four forms of education for learners with SEN which differ in intensity and the specialism of help and support:

1. **Educational programmes with adjusted implementation and additional professional support** (APS), carried out within mainstream education. According to the Placement Act, all groups of learners can be placed in these programmes except learners with intellectual disabilities, as the programmes’ prescribed content and minimal knowledge standards cannot be adjusted. It is possible to adjust the class organisation, testing (grading) and assessing methods, progression and timetables for learners with SEN. All the most common and important adjustments for each group of learners with SEN are described in the guidelines for teachers. According to current legislation, learners are entitled to a maximum of five hours of APS per week. This can be performed either in or outside the classroom, individually or in small groups. (Country Report, p. 25)
2. **Adapted educational programmes carried out in special schools.** Learners are placed in these programmes when the framework of mainstream schools cannot be sufficiently adjusted for the complexity of their disabilities. The adapted educational programmes provide additional subjects and activities such as orientation and mobility, communication and social skills, ICT. This empowers learners’ autonomy and maximises their opportunities for whole life learning and independent participation in society.

The programme is prepared in two levels:

•Adapted educational programmes with equal educational standard: Learners who are

blind or partially-sighted, deaf or hard of hearing and learners with speech and language disabilities, motor disabilities and autistic disorders may be placed into this programme. The programme runs at both the basic and upper-secondary levels. Specialised profiles of special pedagogues and teachers with supplementary special education qualification teach in this programme. Within basic school education there are six special schools with 302 learners with SEN altogether. These are:

o three schools for hearing and speech disabilities with 223 learners with speech and language disabilities and 25 learners with hearing impairments;

o one school within the centre for the education and rehabilitation of learners with motor impairments or chronic illnesses which has 36 learners;

o one school within the centre for blind and visually impaired which has eight learners;

o one newly opened programme for learners with autism with 10 learners in its first class (Ministry of Education, 2016).

•Adapted educational programmes with lower educational standard for children with intellectual disabilities, which may be accompanied by other disabilities. Tuition is at the basic education level and is provided by special pedagogues. After the ninth grade of basic school, leavers from this programme can continue their educational path in the framework of lower-secondary vocational education, although this has uniform knowledge standards. There were 28 special schools with lower educational standard in 2015/16, with 1,644 learners.

1. **Special educational programmes** are intended for learners with moderate, severe and profound intellectual disabilities, aged 6 to 18 years. The programmes can be extended up to the age of 26. The instruction is carried out in special schools and institutions, as well as in social care institutions.

In 2015/16, 1,318learners were included in special educational programmes.

1. **Treatment programmes** are intended for minors with emotional and behavioural disorders who are at risk of being or have already been expelled from mainstream educational programmes due to their condition. Treatment programmes aim to be socially inclusive, preventive, compensational and corrective. They are mostly carried out by social pedagogues, in collaboration with class teachers. If learners’ development is endangered and they need more intensive support, they can be placed in residential treatment institutions. Many of these learners also have mental health issues (psychiatric disorders, self-harm, addictive behaviour, etc.). Social work centres determine the placement. Learners may attend schools within the institutions or mainstream schools. In Slovenia, there are 10 such institutions, with 690 learners in basic and secondary education in 2015/16.There is no separate data about the number of learners in basic education.

Overall, the number of learners who are enrolled and educated in mainstream classes with their non-disabled peers for at least 80% of the time is 10,091 (5.93%). The number of learners in adapted educational programmes in special schools with equal educational standard is 302 (0.18%). The number of learners in adapted educational programmes in special schools with lower educational standard is 1,644, which is 0.96% of the whole population (172,013). The number of learners in special educational programmes is 1,318. (Country Report, p. 29f.)