



Executive Summary

Eastern and South-eastern European Workshop on Inclusive Education (Sinaia, Romania, 14-16 June 2007)

Policy-makers, educators, and curriculum specialists from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine as well as representatives from international organizations (OCDE and Open Society Institute), UNESCO CEPES and Finland (as a reference country in regards to the development of good inclusive educational practices) attended the workshop (23 participants). It was co-organized by Center Education 2000+ (Bucharest, Romania), the Eastern and South-eastern Community of Practice in Curriculum Development and IBE.

The discussion was mainly focused on the need to broaden the concept of inclusive education overcoming the strong tradition of a medical defectology approach (i.e. residential institutions) and the circumscription of inclusive policies to students with special needs (prevalence of the integration model). Although there have been positive advances in terms of visions, strategies and practices, mainly by incorporating groups categorised as with cultural and social disadvantages (i.e. street and working children, Roma population), inclusive education is still not a high-level priority in the regional agenda. It is principally dominated by the objective of integrating students with special needs in mainstream schools. Common barriers of exclusion include a lack of systematic comparative data; diverse models and types of special schools segregated from the other ones; insufficient curricular integration and articulation between Primary and Secondary Education; overcrowded classes; untrained teachers and staff; strong communitarian and family opposition to the integration of students with special needs; lack of official effective policy design and implementation and an absence of public awareness about inclusive education.

A common challenge the region faces is that it is in its history to evaluate individuals not groups, so that the entire concept of inclusive education which hinges on including diverse groups introduces a new way of looking at things (i.e. the way of understanding the curriculum and the links between different sectors and branches, the approaches towards teachers education and the training of teachers). Many countries are in transition and this will undoubtedly impede large scale system change and education reform. Policy discontinuity is a core impediment to advancing in consensus building under a long-term vision. There needs to be a common, broad and shared definition of inclusive education for each nation that can be visualized as a step further in addressing the needs of students with diverse learning conditions and needs in mainstream schools (build upon what has been achieved with the integration models). UNESCO can play a key role in providing a comprehensive conceptual framework on inclusive education which extends beyond just special needs education and reflects the idea of social justice.

Based on the regional roadmap discussed during the workshop and jointly with the Open Society Institute we plan to implement advocacy and awareness raising activities around a broadened concept of Inclusive Education incorporating also the discussion around social inclusion. We also plan to promote the signing and ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).