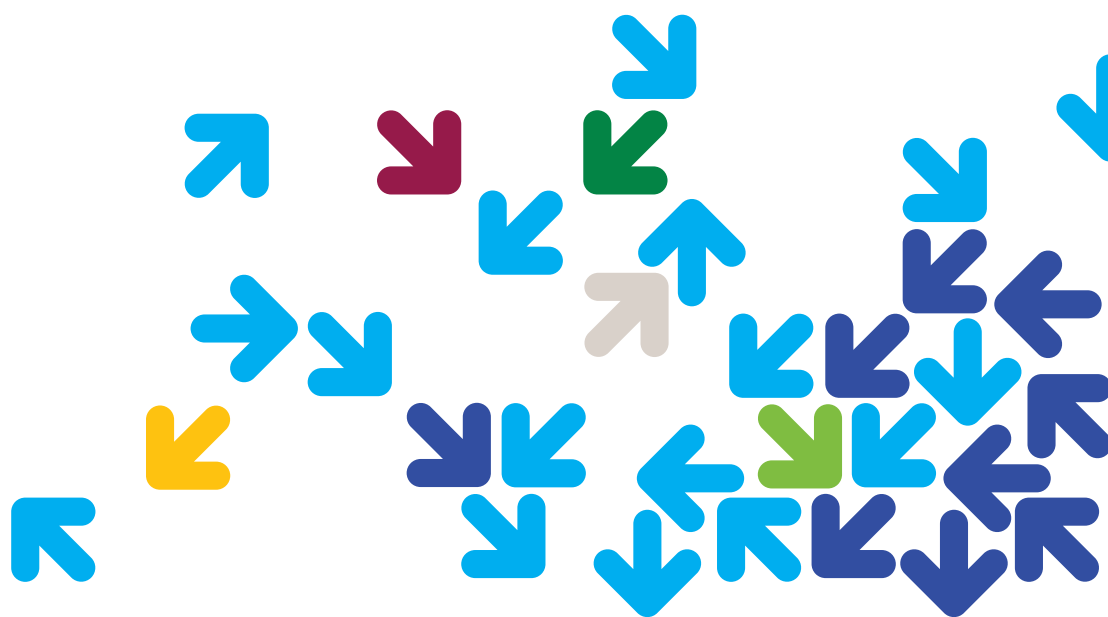
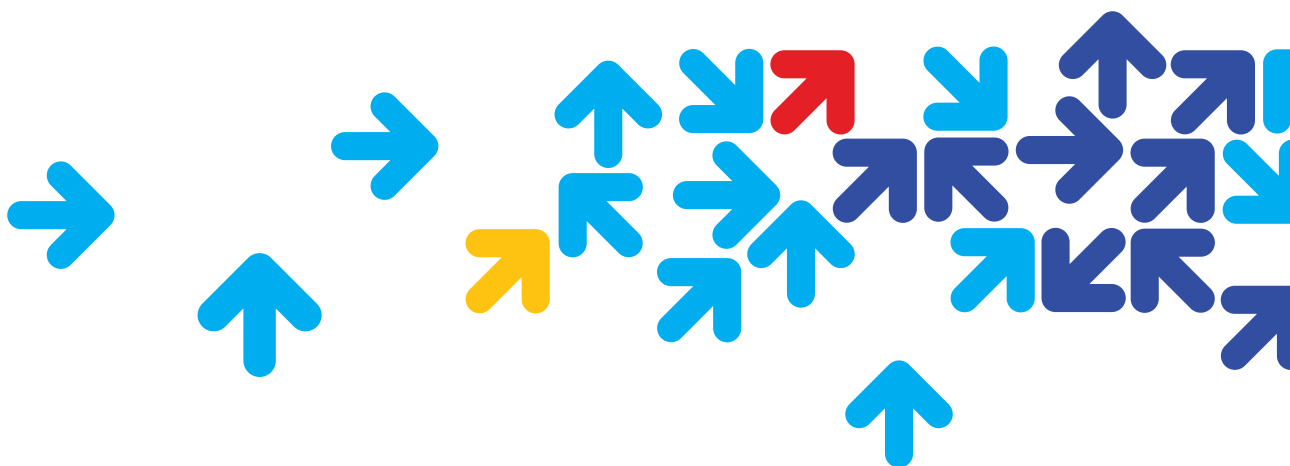


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# THE NATIONAL REPORT ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SERBIA

FROM 2019 TO 2021





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**The National Report on Inclusive Education 2019–2021** aims to present the current state of play and progress as compared with the previous reporting period, along with the key challenges and directions for development with the aim of further increasing coverage and improving the quality, equity, efficiency and relevance of inclusive education. The Report describes key policies and measures at the national and local level, as well as at the level of educational institutions, that affect the status of vulnerable groups of children/students and their families in the education system.

**The Republic of Serbia has made continuous progress in the implementation of inclusive education since the introduction of legislative reforms in 2009. Significant amendments to the legal framework relevant for improving inclusive education started in 2017 and continued intensely during 2019–2021, primarily through the adoption of by-laws at all levels of the pre-university education system.** Reports on the monitoring and improvement of inclusive education from the aspect of compliance with international obligations and the obligations of the Republic of Serbia in the European Union accession process show that Serbia has undertaken a number of policies, measures and activities in line with international guidelines. Serbia has reformed to a great extent its legislative, strategic and institutional framework in areas relevant for the exercise and protection of the rights of children from vulnerable groups, including amendments in the field of education and anti-discrimination, as well as raising capacities to implement inclusive education at the level of educational institutions, at the local and national level. These intensive reforms have been continued through the adoption of the new Strategy for the Development of Education until 2030. The system of assessing needs and providing additional support to students and families from vulnerable groups in the education system has also been revised.

Due to the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the declaration of a state of emergency in March 2020, distance learning has been established for all children in Serbia, and the new situation required additional and specific types of support for the education of children from vulnerable groups. **The Ministry of Education has drafted instructions for schools on the inclusion of children from vulnerable social groups and students that require additional support under state of emergency conditions and the organization of education work through distance learning.** Additional recommendations were issued to schools for students with disabilities so that distance learning and support for children and families would make possible, to the greatest possible extent, the learning and daily routines important for the children. The Ministry of Education revised instructions for the organization of the work of intersectoral committees for assessment of needs for additional

educational, health and social support to the child, student or adult, under state of emergency conditions, and the professional instructions and guidelines for the implementation of the final examination at the end of mandatory education for students that require additional educational support under pandemic conditions and online instruction.

## Coverage of children

One of the key strategic goals of Serbia is to increase coverage of children and improve the equity of the education system. **However, data indicate certain negative trends regarding the coverage of children at all levels of pre-university education.**

During the period 2019–2021, the coverage of children up to 3 years of age with preschool education programmes has increased, and during 2020–2021 it exceeded 30% for the first time in the past 10 years.

The coverage of children 3 to 5.5 years of age has shown a growing trend during recent years, at 66 per cent in 2019–2020, but in 2020–2021 the coverage of children in this age group decreased by approximately 3 percentage points (63 per cent). A similar trend has been recorded for the coverage of children by the mandatory preparatory preschool programme: the highest coverage of children was in 2017–2018, at 98 per cent, while in 2020–2021 the coverage was 96 per cent. This can be correlated to the COVID-19 pandemic and a number of epidemiological measures that were introduced and implemented, including periods of closure of preschool institutions and schools. **Preschool education programmes, particularly non-mandatory ones, are still characterized by a low level of inclusion of children belonging to vulnerable groups.** Regarding the overall inclusion of girls and boys in the preschool education system there are no significant differences, but data from MICS Study 2019 indicate that only 7 per cent of Roma children aged 3 to 5 years living in substandard settlements attend a preschool programme, compared to 61 per cent of children from the overall population. Significant increase trend is recorded regarding the coverage of children of Roma nationality with mandatory preparatory preschool program, by 20%. Mandatory preparatory preschool program is attended by 76 per cent of children living in substandard settlements (52% boys, and 48% girls), compared to 97 per cent of children from the overall population.

**Data indicating the decrease of the coverage rate by primary education in Serbia, with values below 95 per cent during the reporting period, demands further analysis. The primary school graduation rate is also decreasing, and in 2021 4 per cent of students did not graduate from, or dropped out of, primary school.** The differences remain significant regarding children from the Roma population compared to children from the overall population. A total of 8 per cent of children of Roma nationality living in Roma settlements were not covered by mandatory primary education, while 64 per cent of children of Roma na-

tionality completed primary school, significantly below the rate of primary school graduation for children from the overall population. Data show that measures implemented so far give results, so 85,4% of children of Roma nationality enrol in primary school (49% boys and 51% girls), out of whom 80,8% attended preschool preparatory program, which is an increase by 15%. Gross enrolment rate to 8th grade of primary school is 62%, while the primary school completion rate is 64%. Education drop-out decreased by 7%.

The number of primary school age children attending classes for the education of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, and schools for the education of children with disabilities, has been decreasing during recent years, while the number and share of children in primary schools educated using the individual education plans IEP 1 and IEP 2 has been increasing.

**According to data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the coverage of children by secondary education is under 90 per cent, and the net coverage rate shows a decrease of 2.5 percentage points in 2021 compared to 2019.** Although there is a progress compared to previous years, the difference in secondary school coverage of children of Roma nationality and children from the general population is extremely high, and this gap is not decreasing as quickly as desired. Only 28 per cent of children living in Roma settlements enrol in secondary school, while the number of girls enrolling in secondary school is significantly lower than the number of boys. The transition rate from primary to secondary school for Roma students is 52.6 per cent, while the completion rate is 61 per cent. Diverse systems of support and affirmative measures gave visible results. Secondary school transition rate for students of Roma nationality is 52,6%, while secondary school completion rate is 61%, making 20% increase. Currently, 27% of girls of Roma nationality are enrolled to secondary schools are, which is an increase by 12%.

With affirmative measures for enrolment in secondary education, 1,894 students are enrolled in secondary schools in the school year 2020/2021. More than 65% of students enrolled through affirmative measures, who are beneficiaries of scholarships, have mentor's support, and complete secondary education more successfully. For the last seven years, in total 6,533 scholarships were granted to students of Roma nationality, out of whom 65% are girls. In total, 1,213 students receive scholarships in the school year 2020/2021, and mentoring support was provided by 150 mentors.

Regarding children from families with a lower social and economic status, the secondary education coverage of children is also low, at 79 per cent. The number of students in classes and schools for the education of children with disabilities in secondary education is increasing (number of students increased for 327 in school year 2020/2021 compared to the school year 2018/2019), but at the same time the number of students educated based on IEP 2 in mainstream secondary schools has also increased.

During this period, majority of refugee and migrant children were enrolled in the education system (over 85%) and provided with significant support, through realization of over 10,000 additional classes, development of more than 3,000 individual support plans, as well as through provision of nutrition, IT equipment for distance learning, more than 500 books and textbooks, and 650 school kits.

## Quality of education

**Improving the quality of inclusive education is a continuous process and cannot be viewed separately from the quality of education in Serbia.** Serbia has a developed system of external evaluation of the quality of work of educational institutions. However, the process of external evaluation of education institutions according to the revised standards, is still ongoing, hence the comprehensive data on the quality of the work of educational institutions as per the revised quality standards that enable obtaining a more precise view of the degree of inclusion in an institution, are still missing.

**Data from the new cycle of external evaluations show that the poorest achievement indicators include those directly or indirectly presenting the degree of inclusiveness of schools, and there is significant room for improving various aspects of the work of educational institutions.**

International testing that Serbia is participating in, along with results of the final examination at the end of primary education, show that there is a **significant correlation of student achievements with the social and economic characteristics of children and families, with important differences in achievements compared to the degree of social and economic development of the local community.** Data indicate there are direct correlations between the level of education and labour market status, and unfavourable indicators directly affect poverty factors and, consequently, the increased number of beneficiaries of measures and services from the social welfare system, with funds provided from the national and local level. **The results of the final examination show that students who were educated based on IEP 1 have significantly lower results at the final examination than the national average, for all three tests, along with students enrolled in secondary schools based on affirmative action, and these data show the importance of further improving the quality of work with students from vulnerable groups.**

## Equity of education

**Although a considerable amount of progress was made in establishing the legal and strategic framework defining the prohibition of discrimination and use of measures in cases of discrimination based on any grounds, it is evident that children with disabilities, children of Roma nationality, children from rural areas and children with lower socio-economic status are at higher risk of discrimination.** Therefore, during the forthcoming period it is important to pay particular attention to systems of reacting and monitoring in cases of discrimination, harmonization of legal anti-discrimination framework as well as defining and operationalizing the principle of the best interest of the child in educational and other relevant sectoral regulations.



## Institutional and human capacities

The capacities at the national and local level, as well as the level of educational institutions and staff in the education system, are one of the key factors for improving all aspects of inclusive education. **Ministry of Education is investing constant efforts in strengthening the competences of employees in the education system.** Continuous professional development of staff occurs directly, through online platforms and various types and forms of learning. Reports show that collaborative professional development within educational institutions is increasingly utilized, and several educational portals and platforms were created for distance learning and information exchange for staff of educational institutions. Challenges are still evident at the level of initial teacher education in Serbia, as the curricula do not include teacher competences for inclusive education. Numerous teams being formed at the level of educational institutions represent an important resource for improving and monitoring the implementation of inclusive education, while the adoption of the **Rulebook on the Pedagogical and Andragogical Assistant** has created the conditions for continuation of expanding the network of pedagogical assistants. A total of 260 pedagogical assistants were engaged during the 2020/21 school year.

**The institutional capacities were also improved through the establishment and institutionalization of networks for support to inclusive education and strengthening the capacities and roles of educational advisers.**

**A Network of Practitioners for Support for Preschool Education has been established, and 47 members of this Network have been appointed, while 327 advisors external associates been selected,** their role being to provide professional assistance to employees in the education system, inter alia to improve measures to prevent child dropout, support for inclusive education, protection from violence and education of national minorities.

**Activities have continued on transforming the roles and improving the work of schools for the education of students with disabilities,** particularly through establishing a functional link between mainstream schools and schools for students with disabilities, and a clearer definition of the role of these schools in supporting mainstream schools. A Rulebook on the Resource Centre has been adopted.

The formation of various councils and coordination and intersectoral bodies at the national level is an important precondition for the coordination of the work of different sectors and the improvement and harmonization of both the legal framework and the implementation and monitoring of the effects of measures being implemented. However, **the work of these bodies does not have the continuity,** a system for monitoring and evaluating results is lacking, along with evidence-based planning, and **there are often no clear definitions of next steps and monitoring of the achievement of set goals.**

**Capacities and mechanisms at the local self-government level are highly important for the efficient implementation of quality inclusive education.** Although important capacities and mechanisms have been established at the local level – such as Intersectoral committees, mobile teams for Roma inclusion, coordinators for Roma issues, healthcare mediators, health councils, various networks and associations – the implementation and monitoring of inclusive education remains a challenge. **The local level frequently lacks appropriate models and mechanisms that enable, support and improve the educational and social inclusion of children from vulnerable groups.** Local self-governments lack resources for planning and funding educational policy, while local self-governments at lower development levels are in a particularly unfavourable position.

## Monitoring and data collection

**The greatest step forward in the monitoring system during the preceding period has been the establishment of the Unified Information System of Education, which became operational in March 2021, and the introduction of the Unique Educational Number.** The structure and content of Unified Information System of Education have been defined, along with a set of indicators to be used for analytical reporting. Amendments and corrections were made to the list of indicators for Unified Information System of Education related to the functional status of children and students, and plans have been made to connect this database with relevant databases in other systems. Although the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System prescribes that local self-government units collect reports on the work of intersectoral committees and proposed support and its effects at least twice per year, this process is still not functional in some local self-governments. **In the process of monitoring inclusive education, the challenges still include** intersectoral coordination in monitoring and reporting on inclusive education; the different sectors that collect data on children and students from vulnerable groups use different classifications and disaggregation of data; the data are often not sorted by relevant social and economic characteristics, and there are no disaggregated data on vulnerable groups of children (primarily children of Roma nationality and children with disabilities).

## Efficiency of inclusive education

Regarding the **funding of inclusive education**, the most important novelty is the planned introduction of earmarked transfers for educational institutions working in less-developed communities according to the identified needs of educational institutions and local self-governments. The budget classifications at the local and national level hamper the monitoring of expenditures for support measures relevant for inclusive education, and another challenge is the lack of intersectoral budgeting and the monitoring of the system of comprehensive support and funding for the child and/or family from vulnerable groups.

## Support measures

**During the past several years, measures were improved for increasing the coverage and quality of inclusive education, as well as measures for preventing dropout from the educational system.** In addition to continuous improvements to the legislation, measures and mechanisms of support for children/students and families are being implemented at the national, local, school and preschool level.

Significant progress was made in support for the education of children from the Roma population through scholarships, affirmative measures of enrolment in secondary schools, improved support to students during the transition from primary to secondary education, and mentor support.

Support systems were improved at the level of educational institutions through the development of staff capacities, increased number of pedagogical assistants, creation of plans for preventing dropout and identification of children at risk of dropout, and increased number of personal assistants for children with disabilities. The work of Intersectoral committees and provision of additional support to students from vulnerable groups has been further regulated. However, systemic means are still lacking for monitoring additional support measures and mechanisms recommended by the intersectoral committees, monitoring the implementation of additional support at the local self-government level, and monitoring the effects of additional support measures for the child/student and families. In addition to the systemic level, the establishment and implementation of various support mechanisms occur through the support of various projects and initiatives by international organizations and civil society organizations.

In this period, the number of pedagogical assistants increased, so in the 2020/21 school year a total of 260 pedagogical assistants were hired to provide support in primary schools and preschool institutions.

In response to the crisis caused by COVID-19, over 1,890 tablets were provided to the 30 most vulnerable schools where students of Roma nationality are educated, as well as 250 computers for pedagogical assistants with the aim of improving distance learning access for students of Roma nationality. Training for 900 teachers was carried out, and grants were awarded to schools for the formation of Learning Clubs that provide online learning conditions for students who do not have these facilities at home. In this period, 3,000 ToyBox packages were also provided to the poorest families (Roma families living in substandard settlements and other families), children living in reception and asylum centres, foster families and social welfare institutions, in order to support learning through play activities in home environment.

The number of users of the personal companion service increased to 1,841 (625 users more at the end of 2020 compared to 2019), and the number of licensed providers of the personal companion service increased to 1,741 (530 more personal companions at the end of 2020 compared to 2019. year).

## Capacity building and support for the development of inclusive education

A significant number of education professionals have been included in various capacity building programs in the previous three years. By the end of 2019, almost half of the teachers in schools in Serbia (48%) have been trained on the implementation of results-oriented teaching (more than 18,000). From 2019 to 2021, more than 9,500 preschool practitioners and expert associates participated in the training for the implementation of the new Preschool Curriculum Framework. More than 13,000 employees in the education system were included in trainings to improve capacities to provide additional support to children/students in the education system in the previous 3 years, and over 2,000 employees underwent training for the prevention of drop-out.

In order to ensure the full implementation of the Rulebook on procedures of the education institution in case of suspected or established discriminatory behaviour and insult to the reputation, honor and dignity, more than 450 educational advisors and inspectors attended the training in 2020/2021. A video training was created for employees in schools, which aims to strengthen the competencies of teachers for the application of the Rulebook on the procedures in the education institution in response to violence, abuse and neglect. Video training was attended by over 6,000 employees in education by August 2021 .

The National Educational Platform (NEP) for distance learning was created, as well as the Portal - Learning Community of Pedagogues and Psychologists (PIR portal), which are available on the website of the Institute for the Improvement of Education.

MoESTD invests constant efforts to strengthen the competencies of education professionals for the inclusion of refugee and migrant children in the education system. By 2021, more than 4,000 educators, teachers, principals and professional associates have improved their knowledge and skills for education of this group of children. Professional training for 1,800 teachers and expert associates was carried out to improve skills and knowledge to reduce stress in the migration process and implement a new teaching and learning program for the subject Serbian as a Foreign Language.

## Strategic and long-term objectives

Increasing coverage of children from vulnerable groups, primarily Roma children, at all levels of education and reducing the drop-out rate of Roma boys and, primarily, girls.

Increasing the number of children with disabilities in mainstream schools and preschools providing an appropriate support system and increasing the coverage of children from residential institutions by the education system.

Improving staff capacities at all levels of education and ensuring the presence of staff providing professional and additional support to employees, families and children from vulnerable groups at the level of educational institutions.

Sensitisation of staff, parents, and the general public for support to inclusive education.

Prevention of discrimination and violence, including gender-based violence in the educational system.

Further harmonisation of regulations at the national level with international and European legislation, and the establishment of mechanisms to efficiently monitor the implementation of laws, measures and activities envisaged by national strategic documents.

Support and capacity development for local self-government units to implement inclusive education, particularly for underdeveloped local self-governments.

Improving the relevance and funding of inclusive education.

## Further Directions for Development

### Increased coverage and prevention of drop-out

During the forthcoming period it is important to continue expanding capacities for preschool education and improving measures to increase the coverage of children of all ages by the preschool education. Particular attention should be aimed at and increasing the coverage of children with disabilities, and Roma children by the mandatory preparatory preschool programme, and to provide additional support to families from vulnerable groups during their transition between the preparatory preschool program and primary school through the cooperation of various institutions at the local level and through establishing better cooperation among preschool institutions and primary schools. Aiming to increase the coverage of children by the preschool education, further work is necessary on establishing diversified programmes and programmes for raising awareness of the importance of preschool education for all children, and its pedagogical function. Continuous capacity development in local self-governments should be aimed at improving the planning and rationalisation process for the education system and improving the implementation of the regulation governing criteria for the priority enrolment of children in the preschool education.

It is necessary to increase the coverage of Roma children by primary and secondary education, to intensify measures for preventing drop-out, and particularly to intensify work at the level of educational institutions and the local communities.

During the forthcoming period it is necessary to focus on consistent implementation of the child's best interests principle in the decision making on child's enrolment in education and selection of school. At the same time, particular attention should be paid to the coverage of children in social welfare institutions and to the inclusion of children with multiple disabilities in the education system.

It is important to establish systemic ways of cooperation at the local level that can enable the appropriate transition of children to the secondary education and continue and intensify efforts to increase coverage of Roma children by the secondary education, along with measures to prevent the drop-out of children from vulnerable groups from secondary education while applying risk assessment instruments and establishing appropriate and continuous support.

It is important to initiate and conduct research on various aspects of inclusive education, as well as other aspects important for social and educational inclusion of children in the education system, as to provide quality data and information important for evidence-based decision making in further inclusive education reforms and development of social inclusion for every child.

Particular attention during the forthcoming period should be given to monitoring the coverage of children from vulnerable groups by education, and further studies should be conducted that will provide insight into the reasons for the reduced coverage of children.

### **Support measures and mechanisms for children and families**

It is necessary to introduce new support measures and continuously improve existing support measures – the law governing students' standard, rulebook governing priority for enrolment in a preschool institution, Rulebook on the enrolment of students in secondary school, as well as to recognize new target groups and affirmative measures for the enrolment of students in secondary school.

In addition to monitoring the effects of measures on the improvement of the educational status of children from vulnerable groups, during the forthcoming period it is necessary to work on improving the system of funding and on providing more intensive support for local self-government units, improving the work, and transforming the roles of schools for the education of students with disabilities, and establishing a better synergy with mainstream schools.

A more appropriate, precise and complete definition and regulation is required for the horizontal and vertical transitioning of children and students, through laws governing education and relevant by-laws. In addition to support for the transition of children from primary to secondary education, it is necessary to improve the cooperation of preschool institutions and primary schools to establish an improved system for the transition of children between these two systems.

Amendments to the Rulebook on additional educational, healthcare and social support to a child, student and adult, that would ensure that more restrictive measures, such as deferral of enrolment in primary school and enrolment in a school for the education of students with disabilities are not applied before exhausting other potentially appropriate measures of additional support prescribed by the Rulebook.

It is necessary to improve the planning and implementation of support measures at the local level, based on a mapping of needs and through support to development of local action plans for improving inclusive education, as to ensure a participative process in planning measures and mechanisms and recognize the specific features, needs, resources, and challenges of various local communities.

It is necessary to improve the use of instruments and mechanisms for identifying the risks of drop-out at the level of educational institutions, and in cooperation with various institutions at the local level, to develop and implement continuous systems of support for children and families.

Amendments are also required to the rulebook governing the organisation, norms and standards of work for the social welfare centre, towards prescribing that the risk of early drop-out from education represents grounds for assigning a case officer.

During the forthcoming period the focus in providing support needs to shift from the child towards the family, and towards establishing integrated support mechanisms for the entire family through the cooperation of various institutions and various systems.

At the national level it is important to ensure that relevant bodies and authorities such as the Council for the Rights of the Child, Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, etc. pay greater attention to the further development of inclusive education and to the initiation of support mechanisms and measures for children and families in line with their mandates.

Further work is necessary on improving normative solutions and the funding of support measures for children and families at the local and national level (primarily in improving measures related to the transport of children, nutrition, adapted textbooks and teaching aids), and on improving the monitoring of the implementation of measures recommended by the intersectoral committees.

Changes are necessary in the legal framework related to accessibility, such as the introduction of an obligation for public institutions to make all buildings accessible within a reasonable timeframe, in accordance with accessibility standards in force, and a more detailed legal regulation of the process of exercising the right to reasonable adaptation with free and available assistive technology (within the system of education, social welfare and healthcare) for children and students that require this type of support, based on assessments using the social model of disability.



## Improving the quality of inclusive education

During the forthcoming period it is important to work continuously and systematically on nurturing a self-evaluation culture and on connecting the process of self-evaluation, external evaluation, and development planning of institutions.

Descriptors need to be created for inclusive education that will follow the Standards for the Quality of Work of Institutions and Manual for External Evaluators to provide an additional tool for the objective evaluation of indicators important for evaluating the quality of inclusive education.

Aiming to improve the achievements of students and increase equity in the education system, it is necessary to analyse the problems and deficiencies faced by schools in underdeveloped municipalities and undertake necessary steps to improve the working and learning conditions.

Aiming towards greater equity in education and mitigation of social differences, it is necessary to further improve support measures for students being educated based on an individual education plan, and for students coming from socio-economically vulnerable families and children from the Roma population.

Further capacity building is necessary for educational institutions to improve their work with children from vulnerable groups, and particularly, additional support for schools achieving low results in the external evaluation process.

## Improving the relevance of inclusive education

To improve measures for increasing the relevance of inclusive education, during the forthcoming period it is important to direct particular attention to the further development of the link between the education system and the labour market. The following is also important: further development of dual education; development of precise guidelines for the education of children from vulnerable groups while respecting the specificity and needs of students from various target groups; improving the capacities of employees in the education system, as well as employers, and establishing and monitoring support measures for the children and their families.

During the forthcoming period it is important to pay particular attention to improving the concept of the final exam and the matura exam in secondary education in the context of inclusive education.

## Preventing discrimination

Additional research needs to be conducted in educational institutions on incidents of discrimination among staff, as well as among the student and parent population.

The responses of educational institutions in cases of discriminatory behaviour and compliance with legal regulations need to be regularly monitored.

The further harmonisation of legislative and regulatory anti-discrimination framework with European and international standards is needed, as well as intra-national harmonisation, primarily alignment of the Law on the Prevention of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities with the umbrella Anti-Discrimination Law.

Prescribing additional gender-sensitive measures for prevention and protection from discrimination for girls from vulnerable groups and harmonisation of regulations in the field of education with the Law on Gender Equality. Inclusive education support measures, through the system of education, healthcare and social welfare, are to be further developed so as to respond to the specific needs of girls from vulnerable groups, such as girls with disabilities, Roma girls, girls in risk of sexual exploitation, girls in risk of child and early marriage, and girls in risk of drop-out.

During the forthcoming period it is important to continue with programmes for capacity building among employees in the education system, and programmes that improve respect for diversity at the level of educational institutions.

A detailed analysis is required of the content of curricula to identify and eliminate stereotypes and/or discriminatory content.

Legal recognition and the introduction of the concept of reasonable adaptation as grounds for discrimination is necessary.

## Improving the legislative and policy framework

Further improvement of the legal norms ensuring the right of a child to quality inclusive education and operationalisation of the principle of the best interest of the child in educational, social protection and health laws and relevant by-laws, that would further regulate the procedure of determining the best interests of the child in these fields, along with criteria, measures, and evaluation indicators. The operationalisation of this principle should ensure, on the one hand, sufficient precision, and on the other, the necessary flexibility.

Monitoring the implementation of the law and further harmonisation of legislation with ratified international treaties, international standards, and experiences and lessons learned in practice, is needed as to ensure the conditions for further improving inclusive education.

Further harmonization of laws governing education, social welfare, healthcare, anti-discrimination, rights of the child and other relevant sectors, in line with the recommendations of international bodies, organisations and institutions, is necessary (including in terms of further harmonization of terminology in laws and regulations within the education, social and health protection sectors, which govern the right to additional support to children belonging to vulnerable groups).

Regulating the role, conditions, and work methods of schools for the education of students with disabilities, and developmental groups of preschool institutions, and classes for the education of students with disabilities in mainstream schools, in line with the principles and directions for the development of inclusive education.

Regulating the horizontal and vertical transition of the child and student at all levels of education and ensuring primary consideration of the child's best interests in decision making regarding deferral of enrolment of children in primary school, referral of the child to specific type of school, or on education continuation.

Expanding the inventory of duties of local self-government units, and their obligation of funding additional support for the child/student/adult, as to enable a clearer view of the obligations of local self-governments in ensuring conditions for improving educational and social inclusion.

It is necessary to improve the process of planning and monitoring action plans in all areas, to improve their realisation and the monitoring of the achievement of strategic objectives. It is of key importance that action plans accompanying strategic documents are regularly being adopted, and that the measures and target results are quantified, to enable the monitoring of their realization and any changes to their status.

It is important to further develop and specify concrete action plans for inclusive education in line with international standards and challenges identified during the preceding period. In line with the Education Development Strategy 2030, it is necessary for the action plan to further elaborate measures aimed towards the transformation of the role of schools for the education of students with disabilities into a resource of support for the inclusive education of children and students with disabilities and children from other vulnerable groups, measures aimed at the development and adoption of a methodology for monitoring and measuring drop-out and early leaving for various levels of education, and measures to prevent drop-out, particularly taking into account the gender aspect of early leaving and drop-out.

The new action plan should contain measures to improve the monitoring of inclusive education through the development of existing mechanisms for collecting data, developing monitoring mechanisms at the national and local level, and developing annual/periodic national reports on inclusive education, as the implementation of the Education Development Strategy 2030 commitment to making evidence-based decisions.

It is necessary to strengthen intersectoral cooperation and human capacities at all levels of pre-university education, as well as within various sectors at the national and local level, to enable a more efficient implementation of the envisaged measures.

Improved intersectoral cooperation and coordination, in addition to the implementation of measures, is also necessary when developing new strategic documents (Strategy for the Development of Social Welfare, Strategy of Deinstitutionalisation, etc.) to harmonise the terminology and enable the planning of a coherent set of measures for children from vulnerable groups with the aim of support for the social inclusion and education of vulnerable groups.

It is necessary to establish a regular dialogue between different system sectors and institutions, international and local non-government organisations, and donors.

## Building institutional capacities for inclusive education

During the forthcoming period it is important to continue raising the capacities of institutions for the implementation and monitoring of inclusive education and improving the efficiency, quality, and regularity of the work of the councils, committees and working bodies, primarily the Joint Body, to achieve full coordination among different sectors and sustainability of various mechanisms and processes.

It is important to continue raising capacities in educational institutions and school administrations, and further improving the network of mentors and advisors-external associates that play an important role in providing direct support to educational institutions and staff in working with children and families from vulnerable groups.

During the forthcoming period it is important to synchronise and establish better coordination of the work of educational advisers and advisors-external associates through creating joint training programmes and other capacity-building activities.

During the forthcoming period the capacities of local self-governments need to be improved so that they plan support systems for children from vulnerable groups in accordance with laws: training and other activities to raise the capacities of local self-government units, support to local self-government units in adopting internal acts of relevance for planning and implementing social and educational inclusion.

It is necessary to improve the capacities of the staff of local self-government units and local institutions for dealing with issues of the rights of the child, educational and social inclusion, and establish a system of sustainable cooperation and coordination among various sectors at the local level, primarily of staff in the system of social welfare, local self-government unit, and educational institutions.

It is important for one person at the level of local self-government unit's administration to specialise in inclusive education and to systematise a job for education issues and educational and social inclusion to ensure cooperation between sectors and in the future create integrative mechanisms for comprehensive support to children and families at the local level.

Support is necessary for local self-government units in the development of strategic documents with the participation of children and youth through direct work with local self-government units' representatives, and through the creation of brief brochures/informative materials for drafting strategic documents to improve inclusive education in line with legislation and national strategic goals.

It is important to work further on the promotion of inclusive education at the local level, and on the transparency and improvement of the process of budget planning and execution to provide additional support for children/students in line with intersectoral committees' recommendations.

It is important to establish and develop regular systems for support and peer learning between local self-governments through exchanges of experience and good practice examples.

At the level of educational institutions, it is important to conduct a staff workload analysis to avoid having the same teachers and expert associates being overloaded and involved in the work of various teams, and to provide an equal distribution of staff workloads at the level of a single educational institution. It is necessary to consider options for increasing the number of expert associates and secure a greater number of pedagogical assistants.

Further support and better cooperation of schools is necessary with national associations/networks that may represent an important support resource to employees in the educational system.

Having in mind that the implementation of inclusive education depends on the development level of municipalities, during the forthcoming period it is important to work further to define criteria to identify human resource needs at the level of educational institutions, taking into account not just the number of classes and students, but also the specific conditions in the school and community where the educational work is occurring.

It is necessary to define a long-term vision of progressive implementation of inclusive education, guidelines for transforming the role of schools for the education of students with disabilities, and further improve cooperation between mainstream schools and schools for the education of students with disabilities, so that existing resources would be better utilised and to improve the quality of support for students with disabilities.

During the forthcoming period it is necessary to work more intensely on improving initial teacher training to acquire the necessary competences to implement inclusive education.

During the forthcoming period it is necessary to create mechanisms for evaluating the impact of trainings and other forms of professional development of employees in the education system in the field of inclusive education on changes in practices, and to conduct an analysis of the most efficient and effective forms of professional development.

In addition to training, conferences, and professional gatherings, it is particularly important to establish mentor support networks, exchange experiences between various educational institutions, establish mechanisms for exchange and peer learning in various forms of professional development, and create interactive platforms and portals for learning and improving collaborative learning within educational institutions.

It is necessary to further promote the long-term impact of inclusive education, gender equality, anti-discrimination, and the role of the school as an important agent of change at the level of local communities.

Joint training of employees in the education system with representatives of other institutions and organisations at the local level (primarily with employees in the social welfare and healthcare systems, local parents' councils, youth offices) can significantly improve the common understanding of inclusive education and establishment of intersectoral cooperation and joint and synergistic action.

## **Monitoring and funding inclusive education**

During the forthcoming period it is necessary to cooperate with other state sectors to establish a functional method of keeping records on persons from vulnerable groups in accordance with the law (particularly records about persons with disabilities and persons of Roma nationality).

As to improve the monitoring system during the forthcoming period, it is of key importance to further build the capacities of the data analysis unit at Ministry of Education, as well as that of educational institutions, to assure the quality of data being entered into the Unified Information System of Education database, along with the harmonisation of data between Statistical Office and Ministry of Education. It is necessary to inform educational institutions about the method for data entry (Unified Information System of Education) and about keeping records on the quality of inclusive practice, culture and policy, and to continuously improve the digital competences of employees in the educational system.

In parallel with the development of Unified Information System of Education, it is important to work on improving the practice of public availability of data – Open Data, to enable the use of data for scientific research purposes, and for the process of independent reporting of civil society organisations in the field of inclusive education.

It is important to define roles and responsibilities in monitoring inclusivity indicators of the educational system at the national and local level, and to improve the mechanisms for the systematic collection of data on recommended and achieved measures of support for the child at the local level, as a precondition for improving the planning system at the local level. Although the law defines the obligation of reporting on recommended and achieved measures, further work is necessary in developing the system, defining reporting channels, and establishing improved financial monitoring and reporting on support measures at the local level.

It is necessary to work on development of the electronic model for establishment of Data Sets on the work of the intersectoral commissions lead by the local self-governments.

During the forthcoming period it is necessary to work on eliminating the disparity between local self-governments at different levels of development. On the one hand, it is important to provide additional support to underdeveloped and devastated local self-government units through ear-marked transfers for improving inclusive education, but also to provide additional support to these municipalities in developing capacities for planning, implementing and monitoring inclusive education.

To gain a clearer view of the situation and improve the system of inclusive education funding at the national and local level, it is necessary to conduct an analysis and estimate of the cost of inclusive education.

At the central level it is necessary to conduct an analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of education in schools and classes for education of students with disabilities and in preschool development groups for children with disabilities, and the relationship between effectiveness and efficiency and investments needed if children attend schools for education of students with disabilities compared to attending the educational process in the mainstream schools.

It is also important to conduct an analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of support services for children from vulnerable groups provided from the central and local level, including an analysis of the cost-benefit ratio.

During the forthcoming period it is important to develop the model of programme/based intersectoral funding at the national and local level.

The realisation of ear-marked transfers towards educational institutions and local self-government units is necessary, along with the establishment of a system for monitoring the quality and efficiency of spending the targeted funds for inclusive education.









