

Background material for ECNAIS seminar in Prague, 23-25/11/2017
prepared by selected ECNAIS member states (Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Finland, the Netherlands, Portugal,
Greece)

Theme: Inclusion in education

Bulgaria

1. Background of the educational system – main facts which affect specific form and structure of the education system, local accessibility of education, structure of the founders of schools etc.

Education in Bulgaria is compulsory from the ages of 7 to 16. Children complete their compulsory education in upper secondary schools.

Structure: Basic education (Grades 1-7) in Bulgaria comprises primary school (grades 1-4) and **pre-secondary school** (grades 5-7). The **Upper Secondary level** lasts for either 4 or 5 years.

The Ministry of Education and Science creates and applies national education policy, and also plans and organizes the development of education by putting together long-term programs and operational projects.

Curriculum is unified for all schools. It includes subjects such as Literature (Bulgarian, English, French, German), Mathematics, Foreign Languages, History, Geography, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Psychology, Ethics and Law, Philosophy, Music, Arts, Vocational Training, and Physical Education. There are no course levels, i.e. A.P., or Honor Courses in the Bulgarian Educational System. However, in the last two years of study, students are required to take advanced courses in two or three subjects.

School Year

The school year is divided into two terms: the first is from Mid-September to the end of January, and the second – from the beginning of February to the end of June. At the end of each term students receive term grades in each subject, and at the end of the school year they get final grades in the subjects.

Bulgarian Educational system has been in a process of reform for the last 10 years. Attempts to build a new strategic vision and develop legislation have been constantly declared by the last four government teams. Finally, **in August 2016 a new Education Act** became operational. It marks a step forward in terms of underlying philosophy, and yet is totally centralised as compared to

	<p>European standards for freedom of choice and autonomy. The new law is accompanied and interpreted through 19 obligatory State Educational Standards. One of the Standards is devoted to Inclusive education. It regulates the general and additional support all students (including pupils with special needs) get in the school system and in the centers for support for personal development, or the regional centers for support of the process of inclusive education.</p>
<p>2. Definition of the legal term “pupil with special educational needs” – do you have a legal definition? Which one? Does it include also gifted and extremely gifted pupils?</p>	<p>According to the Additional stipulations of the new Law for Pre-school and School Education § 1/22.</p> <p>"Inclusive education" is a process of building awareness, acceptance and support for the individuality of every child and also for the variety of needs of all children and students through activating and including resources directed towards clearing up learning and study blocks and towards creating opportunities for development and participation of children and students in all aspects of community life.</p> <p>§ 1/22.</p> <p>"Special educational needs" of a child or a student are the educational needs that can result from sensory disabilities, physical disabilities, multiple disabilities, intellectual difficulties, language and speech disorders, specific learning disruptions, autism spectrum disorders, emotional and behavioral disorders.</p> <p>§ 1/7.</p> <p>"A child or a student with a prominent gift" is a child or a student with abilities and achievements in the field of science, arts, or sports that exceed the achievements of their peers.</p>
<p>3. Basic principles and rules on which the education of pupils with special educational needs is built in your country – right to education, rights in education, structure and conditions of “support measures” provided to pupils with special educational needs, aspect of “best interests” of the pupil etc.</p>	<p>Bulgarian Constitution, national legislation and strategic educational policy papers proclaim equal access to education and right to education.</p> <p>New educational legislation draws a detailed procedure (in many aspects overregulates) the process of general and special support for all students in the school system, and especially for students with special needs. Although norms and procedures were revised twice by educational authorities over the last calendar year, the system is still more paper and document-oriented than human and student-oriented. Lack of specialists, special preparation for teachers, school leaders and parents, lack of professional consultation services and relatively low level of social involvement are among the main issues.</p>

4. Special schools – their existence, target groups, conditions for admission, founders; if special schools do not exist - a description of the education system for pupils with the most severe forms of handicaps

Following the new legislation, **most special schools were gradually closed**. According to Art.44 of the Law for Pre-school and School Education there are **only 3 types of Special schools**:

- Category 1: schools for the sensory impaired - with visual or hearing impairment.
- Category 2: boarding schools for students with antisocial behaviour
- Category 3: Socio-pedagogical boarding schools for children deprived of parental care, do not have appropriate living conditions with their families, or have anti-social behaviour

All other children and students are expected to be integrated in the regular school system with provision for support from regional centers for support for the process of inclusive education.

5. Financing of the system of education of pupils with special educational needs - how the system takes financially into consideration a pupil with special educational needs and his demands, both in a mainstream school and in a special school

Unfortunately, we cannot provide clear information about financing. Data is fragmented and dispersed, and requires a separate research.

We can provide relatively clear information for the budget year 2014 - 4 million BGN (approx 2 million euro) were allocated to integrated education of students with special needs in public schools. A further 23.3 million BGN (approx 12 million euro) were provided to the existing at that time Resource Centres for their support services to schools and kinder gardens that enrol students with special needs in an integrated form.

Following the newly developed budget of the Ministry of Education, we can only quote the budget figures for the Budget Programme “Facilitation of Access to Education. Inclusive Education” where we have a lot of diverse budget items apart from financing the education of students with special needs (i.e. implementation of programs for access to quality education, inclusive education for children from ethnic minorities, inclusive education for children of migrants and refugees, reforming and modernization of special schools) . The total projected figure for the quoted programme is 133,258 million (approx 62 million euro), including European funding for the programme.

For the time being funds reach only public schools through the so-called delegated school budget. The local municipality calculates the amount per student on the basis of a costing standard defined by the state. The amount for a student with special needs varies from 3000 to 6-7000 BGN (1500- 3-3,500 euro) per student per year. For comparison, the costing standard for a student without disabilities ranges between 1300 and 1600 BGN (650 to 800 euro) per year. No support through state funding is

	rendered to families who decide to send their children with special needs to private schools.
6. The legal role of parents in educating their children with special educational needs - How is the parent's right to choose a child's educational path implemented? What are possible solutions in case of conflict of parental and professional opinion in a concrete situation?	<p>Children with special needs have the right to be included and integrated in regular schools. Parent-school communication in Bulgaria is an area entitled to change if we want to see progress in Bulgarian education. Over the last 2 decades trust has deteriorated and communication immensely suffered resulting in lack of mutual understanding, respect and cooperation. Within this frame, it is difficult to draw a tendency or a typical picture of parent-school communication in the case of special need students. Each separate case would depend on school culture and family values. In many cases conflicts are resolved through seeking higher authority expertise and administrative complaints, rather than mediation and instruments of community conflict resolution.</p>
7. Role of non-public schools in education of pupils with special educational needs	<p>There is high demand for the educational services of private schools in Bulgaria for students with special needs. The individual approach, together with the smaller number of students per class/group, is just some of the attractive aspects for parents. The other two basic advantages among numerous:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive school culture, where diversity is valued and study environment promotes tolerance, mutual respect, friendliness, assistance; • Constantly improving, dynamic teacher teams that are ready to observe, learn, apply new methods and seek new ways to match the very dynamic study and growth profile of special needs students. <p>In many ways private schools in Bulgaria are pioneers in developing programmes, models, and practices for inclusive education. Because of the high demand, they often face the challenge of sending back students as integration requires taking in account the overall number of students in order to preserve healthy balance and sustain quality.</p>
8. Current issues and	<p>Important current issues and discussions:</p>

discussions you are facing in this area in your country

- The school system in general is not ready for a large-scale and quite sudden integration after the closing of special schools.
- Still too much paperwork and centralization through required documents and reporting procedures. It would have been quite acceptable if in a centralized model the state through its educational authorities had expertise to share. Here the centralization reflects lack of tradition and expertise and respectively control because of fear of mistakes and public criticism.
- Teachers have no formal training for the purpose and no previous experience – this makes them see the task as a burden, not as a most humane mission and adds variety of hidden tensions that affect everyone;
- **The integrative model which is currently prescribed by the state is NOT THE solution for a significant number of students with special needs and at the same time schools do not have the capacity yet (if this would be their role) to offer a quality consultancy in constructing effective and flexible individual programmes.**
- Inclusive education on a school level as a mirror of community values and organization maturity.

9. Contact person for further information

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