

EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT FOR DISABLED AND AT RISK STUDENTS IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Minutes of the seminar on statistics and data collection organised in Paris from 5 – 6 December 2005

This activity is a follow-up to the Thematic Reviews of Education undertaken by the Secretariat in its role as Co-ordinator for Education Policy in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

The seminar on statistics and data collection followed a proposal of project administrators at the meeting in Zagreb in June 2005. It takes into account key issues raised in the policy reports on “Education Development for Disabled and at-Risk Students in South-East Europe”, which clearly stated the paucity of information on students with special education needs but also the limited nature of available data. This calls for substantial investment and efforts in the field of data collection and analysis, but also for concrete action. The seminar served to give input to the creation of a reliable database, to discuss country specific but comparable issues and identify the next steps in improving data collection. The seminar was part of the OECD project on “Education Development for Disabled and at-Risk Students in South-East Europe” which started in September 2003 under the umbrella of the Task Force on Education and Youth of the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe.

Two working sessions were organised. The first aimed to deepen insight into the specifics of creating a reliable database in the field of education for children with special needs. The second aimed to review the overall project progress and discuss further development in 2006/2007. Twenty-one representatives from Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and the OECD attended the meeting. Bosnia-Herzegovina and the FYR of Macedonia did not participate in this activity due to organisational reasons.

Working session on statistics and data collection (5 December 2006)

This working session gave the opportunity to ministry administrators and statisticians to become familiar with the main issues, current trends and working methods as used in OECD member countries and to learn from the Hungarian experience in establishing cross-national categories to identify children with special education needs.

Mr. Peter Evans from the OECD Secretariat gave an overview on current trends in the field of statistics and data collection. He elaborated on resource-based and operational definitions of cross-national categories and the relationship between ISCED based definitions, national categories of data collection and cross-national categories. Participants were also given the following OECD/CERI publication, which was published in autumn 2005: “Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Disadvantages. Statistics and Indicators.”

Ms. Yvonne Csanyi from the ELTE University in Budapest presented her key experiences in carrying out a pilot project to establish cross-national categories for children with special needs in Hungary (Nógrád county). She also referred to specific organisational problems in local data gathering and made school-level questionnaires available which had been used on a national level.

Country representatives reported on their systems of local data gathering and presented the main challenges to be faced in future. As a matter of fact, the problems encountered differ from country to country and should be viewed in different historical, political and administrative contexts. However, similarities allowed a joint approach to discussing comparable challenges and possible solutions.

The following issues were raised:

- Necessity of further developing advanced identification (categorisation) systems for children with special education needs.
- Need to make data available from all sectors of the education system (from preschool to higher education levels).
- Establishment of a database which goes beyond information gained from special schools or attached classes in order to reach out to integration of children with special education needs in regular schools.
- Need to efficiently train staff involved in data collection/analysis and the need to improve communication between all actors involved (cross-institutional, cross-ministerial).
- Development of more feasible questionnaires (instructions) and enhanced instruments for data analysis;
- Scarcity of material and financial resources – making use of available resources.
- Lacking compatibility with cross-national categories used in OECD countries, especially those used in groups B and C.
- Problem of “invisible” students with special education needs (children not attending schools or other institutions and are therefore excluded from the data gathering).
- Need to clarify technical issues in electronic data gathering and ensure the availability of user-friendly and reliable software.
- Ongoing education reform with respect to education for children with special education needs.

To meet country specific needs it was agreed that based on the terms of reference provided by the OECD, micro-projects will be identified. These micro-projects should tackle the key issues in statistics and data collection and should be tailored to fit local and national needs. The project terms of reference will be issued in the beginning of 2006 and implemented within one year. The OECD will make seed money available only after the approval of project applications by eligible education ministries.

Working session on project monitoring and development (6 December 2006)

Country administrators reported on project progress achieved since the last meeting which took place in Zagreb in June 2005. They specifically referred to project components such as the school development in model schools, activities in the field of local teacher training, the production of teaching materials and finally efforts made in approaching inclusive education.

The following achievements have been made:

- Identification of model schools which can serve as pilot projects for the implementation of education reform towards inclusive education (all countries).
- Strengthening of co-operation between teachers, parents and the community of model schools. Strengthening of school boards, establishment of round-table discussions with the school community (Moldova, Kosovo, Serbia).

- Implementation of teacher training activities: organisation of seminars, promotion of teachers (Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo).
- Establishment of peer tutoring models and systems (Croatia).
- Translation of handouts of the Zagreb teacher training seminar (Moldova, Croatia).
- Changes in the law on special needs education (Romania).
- Transforming special schools into resource centres (Romania).
- Establishment of new commissions for the identification of children with special education needs (Romania).
- Further development in the field of establishment of inclusive classes (Bulgaria).

To continue ongoing work and ensure sustainability, the following next steps are envisaged:

The overall project will continue in 2006 by providing support for teacher training, school management and classroom organisation, issues of identification of children with special education needs, the development of individual education programmes and the monitoring of pupil progress. The project will also continue work in the field of statistics and data collection. In particular, the following activities are planned:

- Finalising the publication on “Education Development for Disabled and at-Risk Students in South-East Europe”. Missing sources and references will be inserted and the publication will be approved by ministers in January 2006 and the publication will take place in March 2006.
- National dissemination activities with respect to the findings of policy reports. Lobbying and raising awareness throughout the education community will begin in the second half of 2006.
- Croatia and Montenegro envisage cross-border co-operation to enhance peer tutoring models.
- The terms of reference for micro-projects on statistics and data collection will be developed by OECD. The project implementation is due to be completed in spring 2007.
- The Education Reform Initiative of Southeast Europe (ERI SEE) will be asked to provide support in making project documents and key background materials available on their website <http://www.erisee.org>, but also in providing a special section hosting related documents in English and the languages of the region.
- From 23-28 May 2006, a teacher training seminar will be organised in co-operation with the Israeli Ministry of Education and Research. This activity is envisaged as a follow-up to Zagreb and local activities and the following contents are proposed: Site visits (ministry, model schools), education reform towards inclusive education, the development of individual education programmes (IEP) and the monitoring of pupil progress, and issues of identification of children with special education needs.
- Monitoring meetings of project administrators will take place in spring and autumn 2006.
- Project administrators will identify possible participants for an international conference on facilities for students with special educational needs (OECD Programme on Educational Building).

The next meeting of project administrators will take place at the teacher training seminar to be held in Israel from 23 to 28 May 2006.