

# **THE RIGHT TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

Assessing factors that contribute to the practical  
implementation of inclusive education

March 2012



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## Study Report

Assessing factors that contribute to the practical implementation of inclusive education.

This study was prepared with the support of the World Vision organization. However, opinions expressed in this research, are of the authors' and do not necessarily represent those of the World Vision organization.

## Acknowledgments

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### List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Name
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IE	Inclusive Education
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
NGOs	Nongovernment Organizations
PWD	People with disabilities
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals,
IEP	Individual Educational Plan
LCDMD	Legal Commission for Determination of Medical Disability
RED	Regional Educational Directorate
IE	Inclusive Education
SIS	Social Inclusion Strategy
EO	Education Office
D	Disabilities

# I. MINISTERIAL SUMMARY

## The importance of protection by law of the right to education

The right to education for children with disabilities is their fundamental right, sanctioned in international and national acts.

United Nations' newest convention: "Convention for the Rights of People with Disabilities", stresses the obligation of member states to recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education and to provide this right without discrimination, and on the basis of equal opportunities principle. Member states are obliged to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels, oriented towards:

- a) the full development of human potential, dignity and self-esteem, strengthening the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as human diversity;
- b) development of personality, talents and creativity of people with disabilities, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their full potential;
- c) effective participation of persons with disabilities in a free society.

Educating children with disabilities in our educational system, is closely related and can be seen from the perspective of the state's legislative initiative, which in essence implies the State's obligation for care toward these children, in full compliance to legal obligations.

The Constitution of the Republic of Albania provides "protection from discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, language, political, religious or philosophical convictions, economical, educational or social conditions, or ancestry" and specifies that the protection of persons with disabilities from discrimination is proper considering their social situation. The Constitution provides for the education and qualification according to the ability of children and youths:

1. the care and assistance for persons with disabilities;
2. health rehabilitation, specialized education and integration into society of people with disabilities, as well as continual improvement of their living conditions

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) fully protects the rights of children with disabilities, primarily children's right to not being exploited as well as the right of equality with other children, the right of non-discrimination etc.

Based on the International Conventions of Human Rights, every child has the right to be educated in an educational system. In applying this principle, any educational system is bound to involve all students in compulsory education. Education in the Republic of Albania is a national priority.

Citizens of the Republic of Albania enjoy equal right to education at all levels of education that the law stipulates, regardless of social status, nationality, language, sex, religion, race, political convictions, health conditions and economic level.

The right to education of children with disabilities, is a fundamental right of them, sanctioned in international and national acts. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, stipulates the obligation of the state to recognize the right to education with a view to achieving this right on an parity basis for all children, by making basic education compulsory, accessible and free of all financial obligations to all. This law obliges signatory states to ensure that the education of children is oriented towards the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities, in order to achieve their full potential.

In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is emphasized the right of children with disabilities to education like all other children and in accordance with their mental and physical capacity. Also, one of the objectives of the National Strategy for people with disabilities is that: "Educational opportunity be provided for all children with disabilities, giving priority to inclusive education."

Under these considerations, it is the duty of educational institutions to develop and implement educational



policies and objectives with clearly defined tasks, which will make possible increased opportunities for children with disabilities to be an active part of the learning and teaching processes at schools.

The Albanian government and its international organizations counterparts have long recognized that the educational system is of great importance in enhancing the economic and social development of the country. Under these circumstances, a great importance is given to the strengthening of the status of the Albanian education aiming at the transformation of schools into schools for all children. Continuous efforts have been made to provide an intensive professional commitment within educational institutions, and to ensure an equal educational system for all students.

Inclusive education is one of best forms of education for all children.

To accomplish the mission of educating without differentiation all children, the support of traditions and achievements of our national schooling, assumes special importance, in accordance with international treaties ratified by the Republic of Albania, which respects the rights of children and adults. The school represents an institution organized and specialized in the education of every child. The need to establish the school, emerged in a certain period of time and history, to assist the education of generations and social, economic and political development of a given country. Schools emerge and evolve as a multifaceted learning center, which produces flexible educational services and quality for all students, in close cooperation with other social organizations.

To be educated in schools and to be treated with dignity, is every child's right. Teaching should adjust to peculiarities, needs and opportunities of each student, The School is the same for all children, and to continue in it, all are entitled to equal opportunities, regardless of individual abilities.

Learning - educational activity in the Albanian school, both inside and outside it, is carried out in accordance with:

1. The Constitution of the Republic of Albania.
2. The Law "On Pre-university Education System", no. 7952, dated 21.06.1995, with amendments made to Law no. 8381, dated 30.07.1998.
3. Other applicable legislation.
4. The International documents in which Republic of Albania adheres.

The Albanian education system could not have been excluded of the comprehensive changes that encompassed all other realms of the Albanian society. Developments of recent years, the numerous social, political and economic issues that accompany the everyday life, have had an impact, and have brought about continual changes in our educational system too, in terms of content, structure and services it provides. The educational system, is involved in social and economic reforms, and the political relations have changed continuously. In light of these changes, educational institutions have reacted, creating opportunities for all children to be educated according to their peculiarities and capabilities. There has always been an actual need for a new and contemporary design, regarding the content of the task, teaching methodology, environmental adaptation, organization and planning of many educational elements in the educational process, so that children with disabilities would also participate fully in the life of the school community as valuable members of this community.

Educational structures and positions established for nearly five decades now, coexist with new models of inclusion of children with disabilities in basic education schools, introduced after 1990s. In this context, the association MEDPAK in cooperation with World Vision Organization has prepared the study report: Assessing Factors That Contribute To Inclusive Education Implementation Into Practice.

The study aimed to identify the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and experiences of education employees, parents and peers of children with disabilities regarding the practical implementation of inclusive education. This study also aimed at identification of gaps, hurdles and opportunities in implementing legislation to make possible the education of every child with or without disabilities.

### Objectives

- Identify the knowledge, needs and skills of education staff to implement inclusive education in practice.
- Identification of gaps, hurdles and opportunities in implementing legislation to ensure education for all children.

This report will serve as a basis for suggesting improvements to current legislation and its implementation, employee education awareness on the importance of implementation in practice of inclusive education, improving school infrastructure, and addressing the psychosocial and educational needs of children with disabilities.

### The research Questions:

1. Does the education staff possess the necessary knowledge and skills to implement inclusive education in practice?
2. What are the barriers to implementing the process of inclusion for children with disabilities in the current Albanian education system?

This report will make recommendations, which will serve to include the disabled children in kindergartens and schools of elementary education, addressing their problems and needs in this area, and promoting the rights of these children in order for them to benefit from a more qualitative education.

On the one hand this report aims to present the importance of implementation in practice of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Albania as the only and appropriate tool to ensure the realization of the objective to make possible the education of all children. On the other hand, it aims to present the importance of conversion of Albanian schools and kindergartens in inclusive schools and kindergartens.

The report is designed with an interweavement of theoretical and empirical elements. On one hand there is an analysis of documents that reflect the data from the implementation of inclusive education and on the other hand opinions, beliefs and perceptions of respondents (education workers, students, and employees of institutions) on the importance of implementing inclusive education and obstacles and challenges in implementing this process, are analyzed and scrutinized.

## 2. PREFACE

Certainly, inclusive practices in the education of children with disabilities in our country, are the product of the development over the years of the process of special education for these children, retaining and inheriting the best features, embracing the positive experiences of European societies, as well as being receptive to the strong influence and impact of international experience. Inclusive education also has its own history of development and growth in itself, about legislation, organizational management and development of content/curriculum.

The long history of segregation of children with disabilities at all levels of society (in institutions and special schools for them), has created obstacles for the practical implementation of inclusive education, causing it not to come as a natural evolution based on a previous experience or a need or a necessity. Unlike other Western countries, where the development of inclusive education was the product of the active participation of people with disabilities themselves, their parents and professionals, in Albania, international influence and foreign social copycatting on our part, has been the main factor contributing towards this development. All major changes have occurred through administrative activities, and they were not the product of pressure and influence of people directly or indirectly involved in it. The big picture of inclusive education today, reflects the goals and the reality of its implementation in Albanian kindergartens and schools.

There is no systematic documentation for all projects that have implemented models of this type of education or of school initiatives in Albania pertaining to the practice of inclusive education. This has made drawing of conclusions especially difficult. This lack of systematic, valid and reliable data, in terms of comprehensive education in our country, limits any holistic research assessment, as long as the only available data comes from random articles or informal meetings and conversations.

The history of inclusive education, however brief, is saturated with a host of events and processes. Although inclusive education is now regarded as a moral and legal right and as a progressive philosophy, its implementation in practice is forced to observe the numerous obligations imposed by the prevalent mentality of the Albanian society. Much is being said for equal rights that all children in education have, such as equal inclusion of all children in joint activities, but these talks do not ensure successful implementation of inclusive education. There are several factors which are not being checked, directed or planned as effectively as it can be: the high number of students per class, the stigmatizing and prejudicial attitudes of peers, their parents and education staff, low expectations of teachers for progress and achievements of children with disabilities.

All these constraints, at times serious and other times easier to overcome, characterize the type and the kind of inclusive education in Albania and also determine the level of success in its implementation.

All major developments pertaining inclusive education represent attempts made by the government to address the needs of a marginalized group, such as children with disabilities, and responses to political expectations. But these attempts do not represent long-term and systematic planning.

But despite all these limitations, inclusive education is a reality nowadays. This factual reality promotes new priorities and awakes the need to identify key issues that must be decided by state institutions operating in the field of education.

It is a fact that children with disabilities constitute a tiny minority compared to the general population of children, but they must be taken into consideration and respected just as any other child. According to data obtained from the Observer's Office, there is a total of 17,786 children with disabilities, of whom 4,776 are children of 0-6 years old, 8,845 children of 6-15 years old, and 4,165 children of 15 -18 years old. In terms of gender, there are 7,782 females and 7,764 males. Children who should attend preschool education, are



accounted to be 2,289, whereas 5,477 children should attend the 9 - year education and 1,356 children should attend secondary education.

It should be stressed that the gathering of this type of data, has been very difficult because Albania lacks formal precise data measures for this category of children or, information is gathered non-systemically, it lacks clarity and it overlaps. The data presented here was gathered from statistics of the Social Health Service.

If we refer to data collected by specialists of MES, it turns out that in 2010, the number of children with disabilities, included in schools nationwide, was 2,611, of whom 699 had visual disabilities and 456 physical (motor) impediments and the rest mental disabilities, such as hearing and speech impediments, development disorders etc. It should be pointed out that these are not official figures. The disability classifications, on these statistics, is not determined by specialized committees as the country has none. There are no such committees, set up at schools, DED (District Education Department), municipality or commune-based, to determine on the basis of professional criteria, the abilities of children and their capability for education. However, in this context, it is worth mentioning the initiative of the Association "MEDPAK", which in cooperation with Save the Children and MES in the years 2011 - 2012, made possible through the implementation of a pilot project, the establishment and consolidation of two multidisciplinary teams in Korça and Vlora regions. These assessment groups DED-based, assess and address the educational needs of children with disabilities in the respective cities. They are composed of representatives from the DED, municipality, public health and psycho-social service.

If a child with disabilities is considered as an individual with great qualities and potential, despite the disorders, it follows that the child must be given opportunities to rehabilitate in all of developmental areas. Any child with disabilities should live amid other children in order to understand and be understood. No methodology, no technique and no exercise can replace human interaction. Therefore the child's integration and inclusive education must be supported. A child with disabilities, integrated or part of an inclusive education system, first of all is a challenge that must be fully faced, it is a responsibility for everyone because the child must transform into an individual capable to grow, develop and relate to others. Considering the child's development as very dynamic and complex, we conclude that every child needs a systematic and continuous schooling, education and socializing alongside his peers in the same schools and kindergartens. With the country's overall development, these children and their families have benefited as well from the advances and changes that have occurred, just as the others. Albania is one of the signatories of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the country is committed to improve all children's wellbeing. One of clearly stated requirements for the countries aspiring membership in European Community, is the realization of the right to education of all children without differentiation of any kind, regardless of disability or special needs they have.

There are two main reasons why these children should be taught in regular schools alongside their peers. First, because socialization fosters their development and second, because it brings up the abilities they possess. Socialization with the rest of society is the denied aspect in special education, so this aspect is given primary importance aiming at achievements of disabled children

- Inclusion is a process through which it is made possible that all children are involved and participate effectively in the learning process.
- Inclusion is a term closely related to diversity. It takes into consideration the differences that exist among children: age, gender, wealth, disability, culture, religion, and residence, as well as health, social and ethical status.
- Inclusion means understanding and acceptance of differences between children and positive use of this fact to provide a quality development and education for all.
- Realization of the process of inclusion of children with disabilities in education, enables the:
  - Creation of a "culture" full of appreciation, acceptance and support of the diversity in children.
  - Reduction of stigmatization and prejudices that exist for education and opportunities for

children with disabilities in school.

- Establishment of the trust that children with disabilities have capabilities and skills that can lead to the assimilation of the curriculum to their best ability.
- Establishment and consolidation of a contemporary educational system, partakers of which will be also children with disabilities.
- Through the implementation of inclusive education, children with disabilities have the opportunity to learn in the same schools as their peers. They learn and develop just like all other children, regardless of individual differences they may have. They have opportunities to develop skills and individual capacities, as their qualities are shown forth. In comprehensive schools, children with disabilities feel respected, appreciated and taken into consideration, for what they represent, for the capabilities they have, and qualities which they possess.
- In regard to children with disabilities, schools are to be considered as social hubs, as meeting points that place the child in front of a reality, which in one way or another will bring transformation and positive changes in the life of the child and that of his family, as well as in the community where he lives.
- Children with disabilities should “go” to school “to understand and not to be studied” to “be assisted, not to be put under disciplinary measures or strong regimes.” School is a “key point” and a “social hub” for the education of children with disabilities.
- “A special relationship” is forged and structured within the school and between the school community and the child with disabilities. This connection places value and importance on the “education and socialization process of children with disabilities in school and social life. This socialization in school, will later on build a society for all.

In this way, school's function leads to the need for creating “people”, for developing individuals and to develop personalities, although at first glance, they seem “different” or “special”. This process cannot be accomplished without the multilateral support of governmental bodies, without the coordinated participation of the family and social environment where the child lives, without tolerance and support of society and community.

## **Three stages in the development of inclusive education practices are identified**

### **I. The hidden or invisible inclusion.**

The first documented cases of inclusive education, have been recorded in 1996 when children with slight or mild mental retardation, were first enrolled in the kindergartens and schools. These cases were special and were the product of personal initiatives of undertaking educators. They preceded all state and legal initiatives, and represented individual efforts. Unfortunately very little has been documented about the system and the results of these efforts.

2. Projects by different NGOs mark the second phase in the history of inclusive education development. It's worth noting that various projects initiated by different NGOs - were implemented in different kindergartens and schools of different regions in the following period. They began to address the needs of children coming from socially deprived groups.

3. The third phase that coincides with the creation of a comprehensive legal framework to support inclusive education. This phase started from the first years after the overthrow of the communist regime. As a result of this initiative for inclusive education, efforts have abounded and have gained the full support of national mechanisms and governmental institutions. Most of these efforts are limited to large urban areas, creating lackings and gaps in rural areas and their surrounding regions. During this phase, the philosophy of inclusive education has had different formats and ways of expression and implementation.

The table below reflects the distribution of children with disabilities and learning difficulties, in three regions, in which MEDPAK in cooperation with Save the Children, has over the years implemented inclusive education projects.

	Total children involved in the project	Females	Male	Children in kindergartens	Children in school	Children educated through IEP	Children with disabilities	Children with learning difficulties
<b>Three regions</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Korça</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Gjirokastra</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Vlora</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>0</b>

It is also worth mentioning that in the scope of implementation of these projects, the infrastructure of schools and kindergartens involved in the project in the cities Korça, Vlora and Gjirokastra has significantly improved, in order to make them accessible to all children. So in Korça city, ramps were built in “Asdreni” school and in the kindergarten No. 2. In Vlora, ramps were built and toilets were adapted in schools “I. Qemali”, “Lef Sallata”, “Teli Ndini” and in kindergarten Nr. 9. In Gjirokastra, ramps were built in schools: “Urani Rumbo”, “Çajupi”, “Koto Hoxhi” and in kindergartens No. 5, No. 6 and No. 7.

### 3. THE METHODOLOGY

For the realization of the study, a combined methodology was used which interwove qualitative and quantitative elements. The processing and presenting of results of different methods that are used throughout this study, allow more room for objective thinking and reflecting. Comparative data and perceptions of different stakeholders in the realization of the process of inclusive education for disabled children, has been one of the interesting points of study.

#### *Subjects in the study*

Subjects in the study were education employees and representatives of regional educational departments and educational offices that support the process of implementation in practice of inclusive education in the towns of Korça, Berat, Tirana and Laç, with no discrimination on age or sex bases. Included in the study were also peers of children with disabilities that study together in the same schools. Realization of the questionnaires was made on the premises of educational institutions.

• **Quantitative component:** Consisted in the administration of two structured questionnaires posed to these employees, parents and children in regions involved in the study. From cities listed below, there were interviewed 75 teachers and 88 students:

- 20 teachers from the city of Korça
- 25 from Tirana
- 9 from the city of Laç
- 21 from the city of Berat

The questionnaire was intended to gather information from the education employees regarding their

knowledge, attitudes and behavior; regarding the practical implementation of inclusive education, sources from which they had received appropriate information about the importance and usefulness of implementing this process and the use of inclusive techniques and practices.

Information obtained from the questionnaire distributed to students in some schools of the above mentioned regions, related to modes of attitudes and behavior of children toward their comrades with disabilities.

Questionnaires were presented to the respondents during the period February-March 2012.

Once collected, the quantitative data collected, was then recorded and analyzed using the statistical program SPSS (*Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 17.0*).

Descriptive section consisted on reporting the frequency (numbers and corresponding percentages) for categorical variables and reporting the sizes of central tendency and dispersion for numerical variables.

#### • **Qualitative component**

Obtaining detailed information on the level of knowledge and competencies, capabilities and professional capacities of the institutions of the DED's and EOs in the above mentioned cities was made possible through the preparation of semi-structured interviews. These semi-structured interviews with representatives of relevant departments were used to analyze and interpret approaches, perspectives, ideas and suggestions from these employees in regard to the practical implementation of inclusive education in their regions.

##### *Subjects in the study*

Subjects in the study were representatives of preschool and school educational institutions, representatives of educational departments and offices in the regions of Korça, Tirana, Berati, Lezha, and students from these institutions.

Through information obtained from interviews and structured questionnaires, it was formed a clear picture of issues directly related to the implementation of inclusive practices and methods in Albanian schools.

Interviews of stakeholders who play an important role in planning, managing, implementing and monitoring activities directly related to inclusive education, have been an important source for the research in question. These interviews were important because they have served, not only as a direct source of information, but also, each piece information collected, supplied an analytical sense. All persons interviewed in this study had several years of experience in the field of inclusive education, thus giving us a full picture, from their perspective of professionals.

## **4. INTERPRETATION OF THE INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Through the assessment conducted on the basis of interviews with key persons in the educational directories and offices in the above mentioned regions, key deficiencies and issues associated with enforcement of existing policies and laws that favor the implementation of inclusive education in practice, were observed. Deficiencies were also observed in issues pertaining to the vision and strategy of the Albanian education system towards the realization of the process of inclusion in education of children with disabilities. Furthermore there were deficiencies in the preparation and training of education staff in the implementation of inclusive practices and methods, as well as the need for the establishment and functioning of multidisciplinary teams on school and DED bases, to assess and monitor work with disabled children, family school cooperation as one of the main points for the realization of this process, and creating opportunities to turn the school into a school for all children.

***The analysis and interpretation of information obtained from semi-structured interviews with***

**key persons pertaining their perceptions about the process of inclusion in education of children with disabilities, barriers and key issues dealing with the challenges this process faces, roles and tasks of education departments in the process, responsibilities of employees in education and other institutions working in this area of state services, issues dealing with interdepartmental collaboration as the key to guarantee the progress of this process, etc.**

- A. In the interview with the employee of educational directory of the city of Tirana,** she identified issues relating to the practical implementation of inclusion in the education process of children with disabilities. According to her, the implementation in practice of this process faces a number of difficulties pertaining: the high number of pupils per class, which varies from 32 to 38 students per class (in these conditions the inclusion of a child with disabilities to basic education classes becomes difficult), lack of proper qualifications of staffers of education is another challenge. The turnover of teaching staff working in education service, is another item in the list of problems this process faces. She says that the lack of an open and supportive climate for children with disabilities, constitutes another problem that slows down the implementation of this process. Her perspective on inclusive education consists in creating an educational system that creates opportunities for all children to attend school without any discrimination, and without segregating them in special schools. She says that negative attitudes towards inclusive education on the part of the teachers are observed, or that they do not show or do not hold positive attitudes toward students with disabilities. Most of them do not feel competent to teach students with disabilities in their classes of regular elementary education. Teaching methods that teachers use, are the same for the whole class with almost no individualization or adaptation at all for students with special educational needs.
- B. In the interview with the employee of educational directory of the city of Korça,** the importance and necessity of implementing in practice the process of inclusion in education of children with disabilities, was emphasized as a friendly tool that creates opportunities for all children to participate in the learning process. She says that this process is very important not only for children with disabilities, but also for other children, for it strongly affects the increase of their civic education, making them more open, more tolerant and more helpful to their peers with disabilities. According to her, great help in this process was provided by non-governmental organizations such as Save the Children, which has supported through various projects, the implementation of this process. She thinks that sometimes, teachers' expectations for achievement, the level of mastery of the curriculum, as well as capabilities and capacities of children with disabilities, cause their exclusion from the active learning process. Regarding issues related to educational curriculum, she emphasizes its lack of flexibility as it creates more difficulty to achieve full inclusion of children in the educational process. As a positive factor, she mentioned that it has helped in the realization of this process, the engagement of psychological - social service employees in school and the high level of cooperation of teachers with parents of these children. She adds also that the construction of several ramps and adjustments of toilets that MEDPAK and Save the Children have realized in some of the kindergartens and schools in the city, have significantly increased access of children with disabilities to educational institutions.
- C. In an interview with the employee of educational directorate of the city of Laç, several reasons were identified,** which, according to her, explain the failure to implement in practice the process of inclusion of children with disabilities. It presents some issues by listing them as causes of failure in the practice of inclusive education:
- Lack of supporting teachers in basic education classes;
  - Lack of interagency collaboration;
  - Lack of cooperation school - family;
  - Lack of awareness of education employees, parents and the community, understanding and acceptance of the importance of implementation in practice of inclusive education;
  - Lack of professionalism of staff dealing directly with the teaching of children with disabilities in terms of identifying and addressing their needs in ways appropriate to these needs;

- Failure to apply the relevant existing legal framework.
- The existence of prejudices and high level of stigmatization that exists for these children;
- School buildings not adapted for disabled children.

**D. On an interview with the employee of educational directorate of the city of Berat,** a number of positive factors were identified, that to her opinion, have played an important role in the successful implementation of the process of inclusion in education of disabled children::

- Implementation of early intervention as a prerequisite that creates opportunities to ensure the inclusion of all children in educational institutions;
- Reduction of stigmatization and prejudice against children with disabilities, as a result of increased awareness and sensitizing of teachers, parents, school community and society.
- Supporting parents of other children;
- Empowering parents of children with disabilities to exercise pressure on educational institutions for the enrollment and admission of disabled children in the same schools and kindergartens just like the other children;
- Implementation of inclusive practices in preschool institutions, to make way for the process of inclusion of children with disabilities in other later stages of their education;
- Improvement of school infrastructure to ensure equal access for all children

She says that all inclusive education at the preschool level, is more manageable and more acceptable than in the higher educational levels. Kindergarten children are more open and accepting to play and learn together; kindergarten teachers are more involved in working with children with disabilities. Further on, she makes sure to mention that as a result of structured interventions that were piloted over the years in the form of inclusive education projects in the city of Berat by “Save the Children” organization, a considerable number of children with disabilities, are currently part of school community or pre-school institutions, staying with the other children in the same kindergartens and schools.

She describes positively the attitudes of the peers of children with disabilities in kindergartens and schools, noting that there is an acceptance at personal and emotional levels towards children with disabilities and the attitudes and behavior of other children is more open and supportive than what it has been many years ago. Representative of the educational directorate of this city, brought up an interesting and praiseworthy case in terms of tolerance and support that other children provide for their disabled friends.

Grade 5 students – of a 9-year school, who had in their classroom a child with severe motor problems, had made an agenda that showed the day that each one of them was to accompany their friend home, to school, or to the toilet. When their friend was absent from school for health reasons, they would visit him at home to help him prepare the homework.

## **She also presents some obstacles in implementing inclusive education**

1. The large number of students per class and the lack of an assistant who would devote himself entirely to the development of one or two children they have in their regular classrooms, makes the attention towards this category of children, be minimal
2. The authors of textbooks in their conception and drafting process do not specifically envisage in the process, this category of children as students, which causes deep issues and misunderstandings, to occur during the learning process, not only in regard to these children but also for their parents who try to give their pedagogical contributions towards the understanding of concepts and the creation of certain skills. A higher psychological capacity is required of the textbook authors, or maybe be it should be regarded as a requisite to include in the group of authors of textbooks also



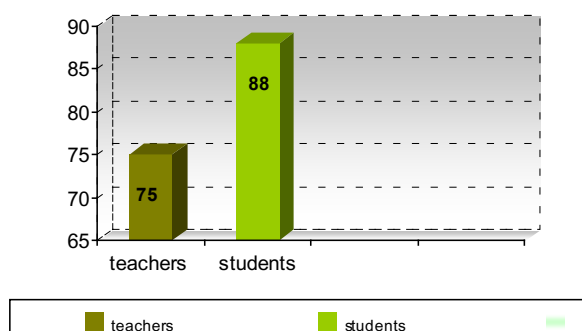
a specialist of the work with children with disabilities (for those of young age, there is a lack of attractive illustrations, fun tasks that would naturally include this group of children as well)

3. The teachers themselves are not always qualified to work with these children. Lack of training in this area not only hampers learning and social relationships for these children, but often also that with their parents who often times confuse the lack of know-how of teachers with their sense of responsibility (considered low by parents), along prejudices often harmful to their own children's development
4. The assessment of the achievements of these students, is much like that of all the others, which often creates contradictions between teachers and management, because in such cases, it is the management that are not fully aware of the work that is made with children with special needs nor of the evaluation criteria that must be applied in their case

## 5. ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

The descriptive section consisted of reports on frequencies (numbers and corresponding percentages) for the categorical variables and reporting sizes of central tendencies and dispersion sizes for numerical variables.

Starting the presentation of quantitative data in Figure 1 it is displayed **the division of the respondents to conduct the study in a group of teachers and peers of children with disabilities in schools.**

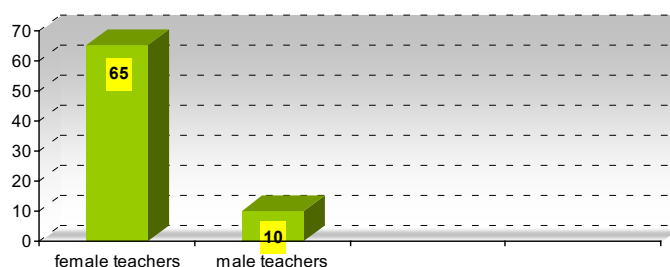


**Figure 1**

Figure 1 shows that the study included 75 teachers of kindergartens and schools that are subject of the research and 88 students and peers of children with disabilities that attend the same schools. It should be emphasized that the research included the school in which there are projects implemented by various organizations striving for IE, and schools in which projects of this nature have not been implemented

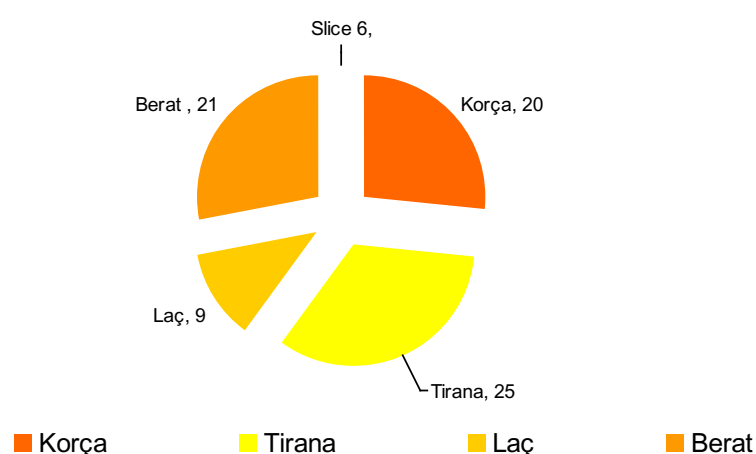
**Figure 2**

This chart shows the gender composition of the total teachers involved in the research



The high number of female teachers included in the research (65), may be explained by the fact that in preschool educational institutions, there are only female teachers, and the number of female teachers in schools is also greater than that of male teachers. From a gender perspective, this can be explained by the fact that gender roles influence the choice of professions, as teaching is a profession that is more related to women because of their personality traits.

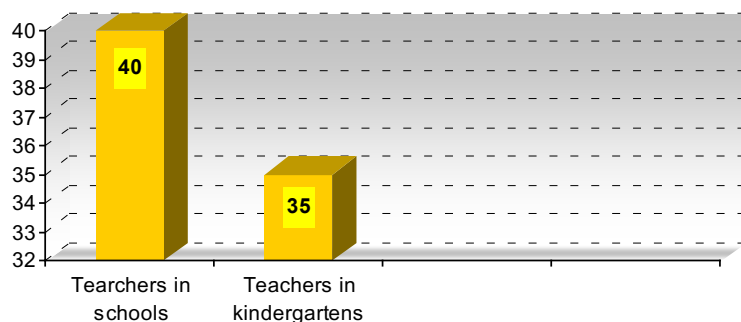
**Figure 3** shows the distribution of teachers involved in the study by region:



It is worth mentioning that in the study were included regions which are implementing projects of adaption of the inclusive education in kindergartens and schools, headed by the Save the Children organization. Such cities are Tirana, Korça and Berat, but cities in which no project of this kind have been implemented yet (city of Laç) were included as well. The data of this chart, reflects the distribution of teachers interviewed in the above mentioned regions. (Included in the study were 21 teachers in the city of Berat, 20 in Korça, 25 in Tirana and 9 in the city of Laç.

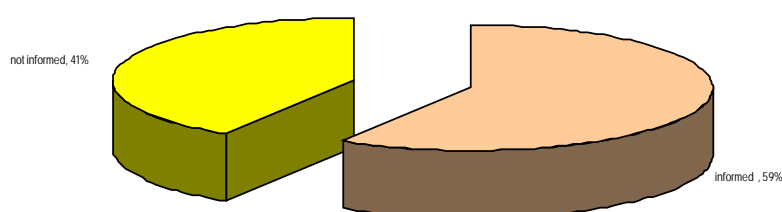
**Figure 4**

The following chart shows division of the education employees included in the research, by educational institutions (preschool and school institutions)



**Figure 5**

This chart displays information about teachers' knowledge on inclusive education.



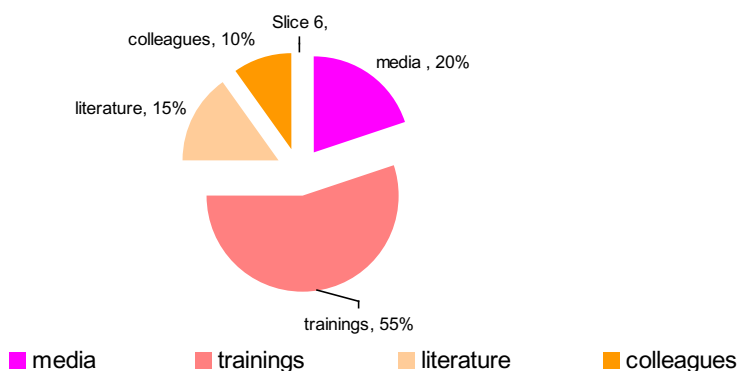
59% of education employees interviewed, claim they have heard and have received information about inclusive education and its purpose. This contradicts the fact that despite the fact that a considerable number of teachers have the necessary information on inclusive education and its philosophy, a small number of them only 24% apply IEP to children with disabilities, and only 26% of them use techniques and inclusive practices

during the class session. This might be due to the fact that inclusive education for these workers is just a theory, not something feasible in practice, or the simple reason that traditional methods of teaching **still continue to dominate in kindergartens and schools.**

**Figure 6**

The following chart shows the sources from which teachers have received appropriate information about inclusive education and its philosophy.

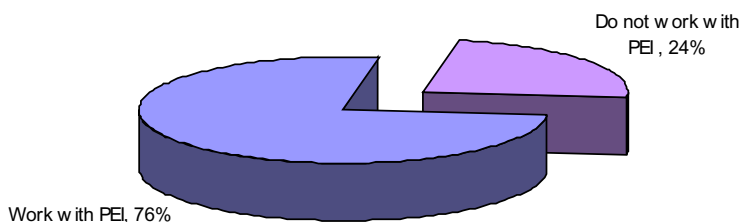
As seen from the chart data, a considerable number of teachers have received information about inclusive education policy from various training courses that are organized by different associations or the Ministry of Education and Science. Thus trainings seem to be the main means of dissemination of relevant information to education staff.



The following graph reflects the number of teachers who apply Individual Educational Plans in their work with children with disabilities,

**Figure 7**

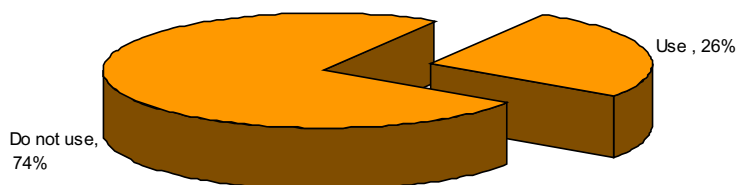
Only 24% of teachers design and implement IEPs for children with disabilities so that they may be actively involved in the learning process. This can be explained with the lack of professional skills to design and implement IEP for disabled children, or the lack of interest in eliminating the barriers in learning for these children, or due to the busy schedule of teachers, or other reasons.



**Figure 8**

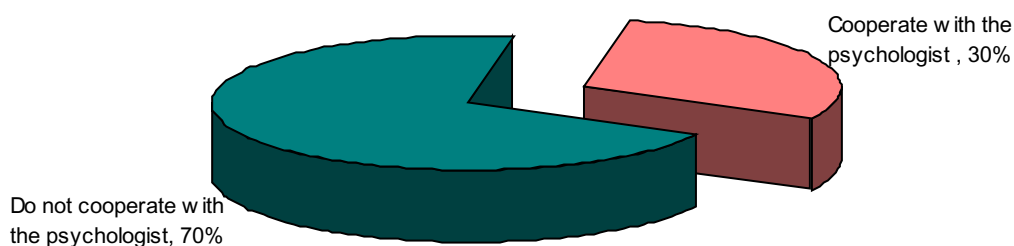
This chart provides information regarding the use or non use of inclusive practices and methods by teachers during class sessions

As seen from the graph, only 26% of teachers working in kindergartens and schools, use inclusive methods and practices in their daily work with children with disabilities. This may be related to the fact that few teachers have developed and expanded their professional capacities in terms of working with children with disabilities, or it may be explained by the low expectations and false beliefs of educational employees in terms of achievements and development of children with disabilities.



**Figure 9**

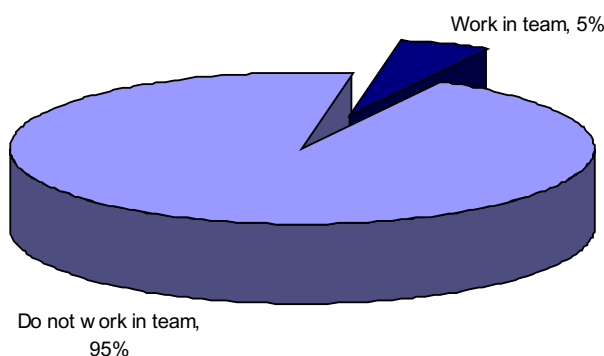
The following chart presents information on the number of teachers who cooperate with psychosocial service employees, to support and assist the process of inclusion of children with disabilities in school life.



As shown on the chart, only 30% of teachers cooperate with the psychologist of the kindergarten in order to accomplish the process of inclusion of children with disabilities in education. In a broader sense, these teachers converse with psychologists, allow their participation in classes and intramural or extracurricular activities, call for the expertise of employees of psychological and social service, share with them information on children with disabilities, and accept their advice and suggestions.

**Figure 10**

The following chart provides us with information about ways of working in educational institutions.



Although teamwork nowadays is one of the best and most contemporary forms of working, in educational institutions, it seems that this approach does not apply. Only 5% of interviewed teachers, reported that they work on a team, that discuss with each-other on the performance and progress of children with disabilities, the challenges and difficulties they face in the learning process, intervention strategies aiming at overcoming these difficulties, approaches and techniques that enhance the participation of these children in the learning process.

**Figure 11**

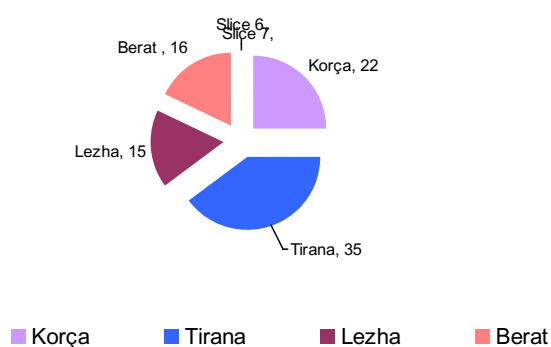
The following graph provides information on the cooperation of teachers with parents of children with disabilities.

As seen from the data in the graph, it is clear that only 44% of teachers have a collaborative relationship with parents of children with disabilities, which means that parents and teachers have frequent and periodic contacts, support the work of one - another and work together to help the child to learn the curriculum and in his/her socialization process. This means that parents and teachers' expectations about school and family, as well as the achievements of children with disabilities have common grounds, that the level of their awareness to ensure an effective partnership family - school is top notch.



**Figure 12**

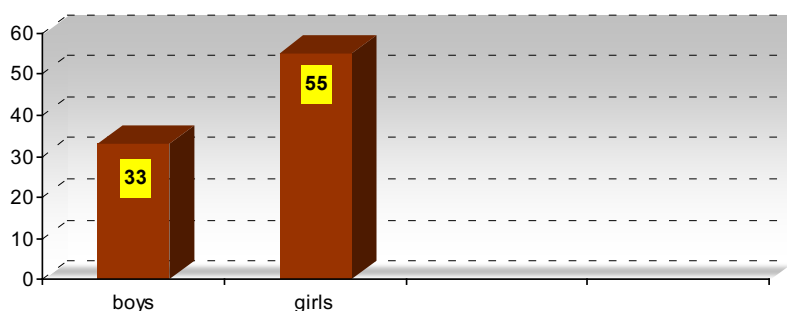
The following graph shows the distribution of students interviewed by the respective regions.



**Figure 13**

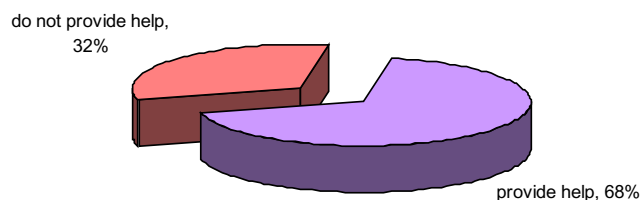
This graph provides information about gender distribution of students involved in this research

As seen from the chart's data, there are more girls than boys included in the research. This can be explained by the fact that there is a higher percentage of girls compared to boys, or perhaps with the fact that girls are more willing to provide information



**Figure 13**

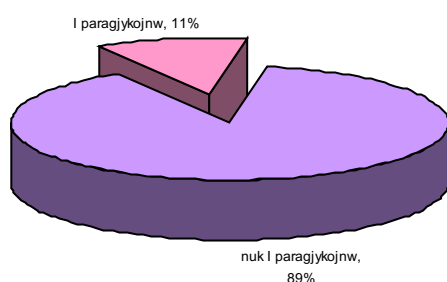
In this graph are shown the attitudes of children towards their disabled peers, regarding the assistance and support they offer in response to the needs of these children



As seen from the data in the chart above, a considerable number of children (about 68%) of them help and support their friends with disabilities by taking out their books and other items from their bookbags, accompanying them to the toilet, helping them carry the bag, help them be safe, assist them with the homework, etc.

**Figure 14**

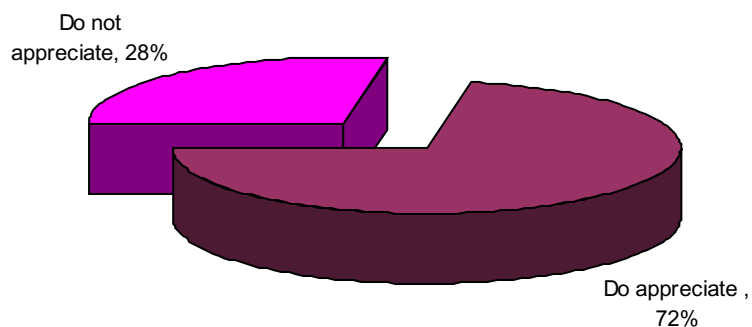
The following chart reflects the attitudes of peers of children with disabilities.



By reference to the data displayed on the graph, it is observable that other children hold admmissive and supportive attitudes towards their peers with disabilities. About 89% of them stated that they do not prejudice the children with disabilities they have as classmates, do not call names or mock them, do not mercy them but are tolerant of differences that exist between them, without talking too often about these changes.

**Figure 15**

The following chart provides information about the high regard that other children express about their peers with disabilities.



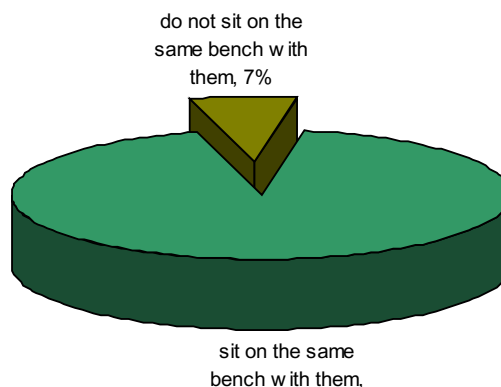
As can be seen in the chart, more than half of the children involved in the research, about 72% of them, appreciate their peers with disabilities for their qualities and capacities, regardless the differences that exist between them. They appreciate their qualities and talent in music, painting and play dough work.



**Figure 16**

In continuation to the above, the following graph provides information about children's behaviors and attitudes towards their peers with disabilities.

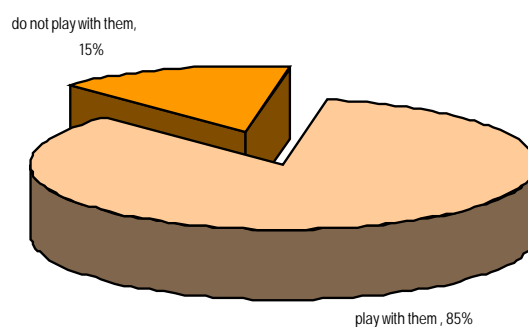
Almost all children (93% of them) agree to sit on the same desks with their peers with disabilities, to talk about different things with them, do not show resistance if the teacher appoints a friend with disabilities to sit in the same desk with them, nor sit reluctantly next to them.



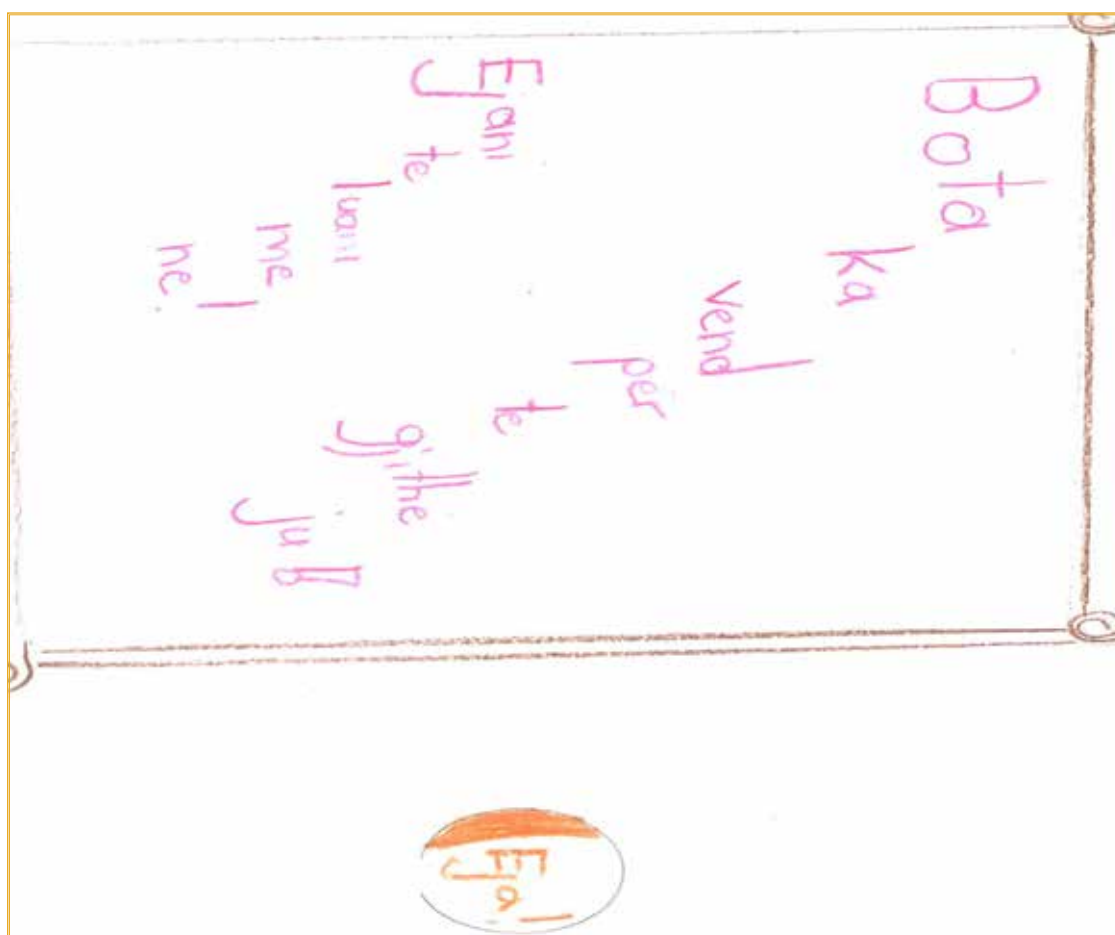
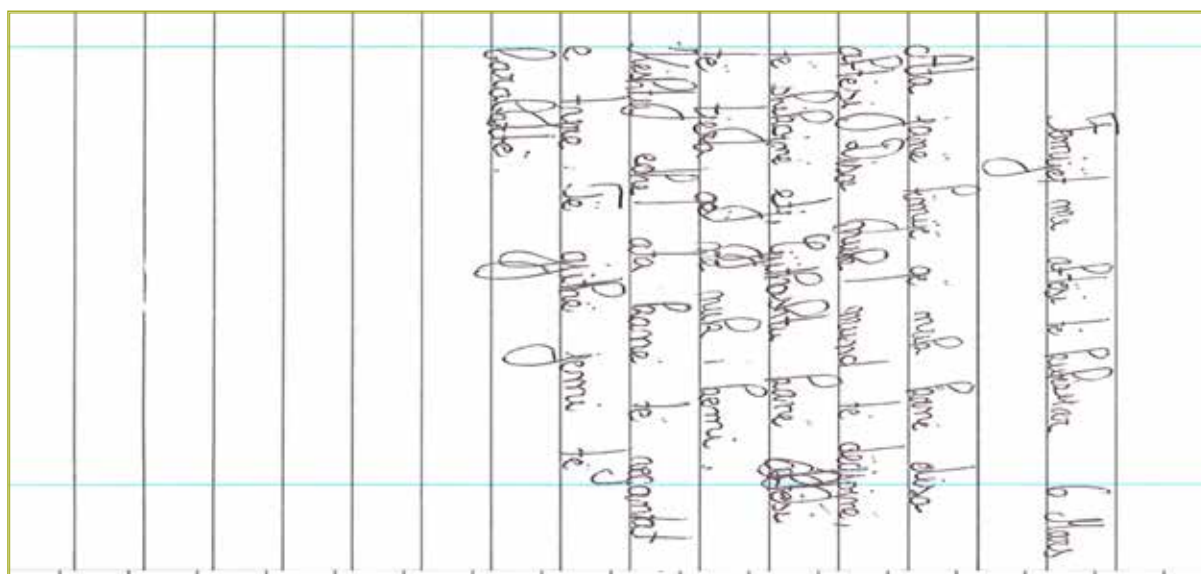
**Figure 17**

In the following chart information is provided about how other children accept and support their peers in extra curriculum activities.

85% of children play together in groups or in pairs and with their disabled peers, without discriminating or secluding them, treating them as equals despite differences they have, stimulating their inclusion in games and other activities of that kind, without prejudice to their abilities and skills.



## STUDENT CREATIONS ON THEIR ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR TOWARDS CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES





## Findings

- The policies of the past are still used, unfortunately, in terms of educating children with disabilities in special schools, and the policies seems to still undermine the process of inclusive education..
- There are teachers who think and believe that children with disabilities must continue to be educated in special schools.
- Lack of systematic evaluation of educational needs of children with disabilities by multidisciplinary teams or specialized bodies have made the children with disabilities face many challenges in their education process.
- There are still many uncertainties in daily practice regarding the legal framework application.
- There are numerous shortfalls in fundamental structures within the structure of elementary schools.
- Best practice, which provides all children equal rights to education, to date is considered to be the practice of implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities.
- The other children are receiving and supporting towards their peers with disabilities, they stay with them, helping, playing, and not prejudicing towards them, are tolerant of differences that exist between them.
- Working with children with disabilities is a complex procedure that requires prompt intervention and with multiple objectives simultaneously.
- There is an extensive problem in the implementation of IE: lack of flexibility of the curriculum, lack of special didactic tools, lack of prepared teachers and support of other professionals needed such as speech therapists, psychologists and social workers.
- Inclusive education is considered effective for children with disabilities
- The implementation of this process in all its complexity, is still a challenge for the Albanian society. Fulfillment of this requirement constitutes a major concern from stakeholders in the field of education.
- Early intervention and gradual expansion of comprehensive education from preschool educational institutions to the higher education levels, is momentous move in welcoming these children, to support and develop the skills and their full capacity.

## Recommendations

- Children with disabilities learn from each other in inclusive environments, therefore, it is important that the attitude and position of children should encourage and stimulate the involvement of all children in an educational or social activity.
- Children with disabilities spend less time in interaction with their peers, compared to other children, so it is important that this time frame be of maximum use to teach them new concepts and skills in accordance to their level of development.
- Concepts that will be taught to children with disabilities need to be simplified as much as possible.
- It is necessary that teachers initially determine a child's educational needs, determine the current level of its development, to determine the level of his involvement in educational and social activities and then design a plan of intervention.
- The teacher should identify whether a child manifests behavior difficulties, should select skills and concepts that are easier to adopt by the child, taking into consideration the priorities and needs of the child.

- Teachers should use positive reinforcement when children with disabilities achieve the desired result, but even when they reach not the desired goal, they must be encouraged in their efforts.
- Teachers should promote the active involvement of children with disabilities in all curriculum or extra curriculum activities of their peers.
- Teachers should know that every child with disabilities has his or her own pace of development and that this pace depends largely on the opportunities and skills that the child possesses, but also on the stimulation and encouragement of the child to learn and acquire new skills and habits.
- Children with disabilities should be taken into account just like the other children and should be helped to fully participate (as much as the level of their development and ability allows) in all areas of preschool program. To this purpose, it may be necessary to adjust the class environment, or that specific activities be modified and adapted to enable the inclusion of children with disabilities alongside their peers.
- Children with disabilities, who despite various difficulties and issues, possess abilities and skills that have to be identified and promoted, in order for them to engage fully in the educational process and in social life.
- Teachers need to plan and modify activities depending on the needs of the children in terms of learning, and consider the strengths of each child, including those with disabilities. Each teacher, when planning the activities, must pose to herself and colleagues, some questions:
  - Could all children participate in this activity, and how could that be achieved?
  - How would a child with hearing or visual impairments be included in this activity?
  - What should be adjusted in order for children to enhance their sensory skills?
  - How could a child with intellectual disabilities, manage to have an active participation in a certain planned activity?
  - How could we arrange the time of the group activity in a way that makes possible the participation of also children with attention disorders and behavioral problems?
- Multi-disciplinary DED and school-based teams, must be established and consolidated.
- The number of employees of psychological and social service in kindergartens and schools, must increase.
- There must be established an interagency collaboration involving institutions from the areas of education, health and the psychological and social services.
- Cooperation links between schools and families, need establishing.
- Development and broadening of education staff's capacities should continue through training courses, dissemination of informative materials as well as replication of the most positive models.
- The compilation and implementation of IEP is needed in order to support children with disabilities in their learning process.
- Legal framework enforcement must be ensured by relevant authorities.
- The present level of stigmatization and discrimination against children with disabilities and their achievements, must be lowered through awareness raising and sensitization campaigns.
- Content of curriculum, school structure, infrastructure, students' own characteristics, are all a cluster of parameters that must be considered in implementing any form or stage of inclusive education.
- In designing and developing curricula, special goals should be set for children with disabilities. Also, there should be provided more specific guidelines for assessing the achievements of these children.

- Evaluation of winning (in tenders) textbooks should include the criteria of meeting the objectives of achievements for children with special needs. Textbooks, especially elementary school ones, should contain illustrations appealing to children's age by encouraging them to think and learn actively.
- Establish a network of national trainers to prepare teachers to work for children with special needs, but also for the staff of the textbook authors, publishing houses, etc. so that curricula and other supplementary materials, become more effective and useful for students and their parents
- Curricular documents in our school system, must determine the **goals, objectives and functions** of different areas of knowledge in response to mental and physical diversity of students.
- They must submit **methods** to be used to implement the general and communication skills by providing some aspects of learning and teaching operations. In this context, students must demonstrate mastery of knowledge, skills and habits and values in accordance with their potential capabilities.
- The objectives of the educational curriculum should be a useful document to help teachers, textbook authors and other resources used in the learning process, in the assessments by specialists, in training and qualifying institutions of teachers and parents, etc.





