EDUCATION
OF STUDENTS
WITH LOW LEARNING
ACHIEVEMENTS
EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH LOW LEARNING ACHIEVEMENTS
The starting points of the two a. analysis conducted within the framework of the project “Roma Education Program” at the end of 2012 are the equal rights to education of children. That means: each individual should have equal opportunities to progress in the education system and that he or she obtains the education and knowledge in accordance with his or her abilities.

The first analysis is based on an empirical field research focused on students with low learning achievements and aimed at examining the effects of the compensatory classes, that is, whether and to what extent the legal changes have introduced improvement in the quality of education of the students with low achievements. Wider consultation is required at the society level for the purpose of improving the situation with the quality of education of the children with low achievements, through which, without hasty solutions and without an imperative to come to an immediate result, a well thought off, principled and long-term strategy will be created.

The aim of the second comparative analysis Supporting Measures for Underachieving Students is to give an overview of the measures taken by different countries in support of students with underachievement, and to give proposals of measures that would be most suitable or necessary for the Macedonian educational system, with emphasis on areas, aims and measures where the Foundation Open Society – Macedonia is working and where it may offer assistance. It is not a comparative study of all the measures that are designed for underachieving students in different school systems, but only of the measures that are suitable for the state school system in Macedonia, and which can generally be assumed to be applicable and would achieve the desired results.
The third part of the publication contains recommendations that we consider possible to become part of the educational practice in our schools. Part of the suggested recommendations refer to **system level**: free, mandatory pre-school education in the first year before starting school, but also an offer of different forms and programs of pre-school education for the children which will increase the rate of coverage; financial support for the students with low achievements, but provided additional support for the schools they attend as well; information system for gathering and maintaining data on students at risk of dropping out school; introduction of “Second Chance” programs offering alternative pathways for completion of the mandatory education; **school level**: offer of a wide range of activities and approaches regarding the support of the students with low learning achievements, timely and quality professional counseling of students and parents, in cooperation with other appropriate institutions (health, social), if needed, appropriate training and professional development of the teachers for support of students with special educational needs; flexible schedule for the students with low achievements which will make the filling of the knowledge gaps in a quality manner possible.
PART ONE
THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH LOW ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTS OF THE OBLIGATORY COMPENSATORY CLASSES
Author: Ognen Spasovski

PART TWO
SUPPORTING MEASURES FOR UNDERACHIEVING STUDENTS
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PART THREE
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING MEASURES FOR STUDENTS IN MACEDONIA
Foundation Open Society - Macedonia
PART ONE

THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH LOW ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTS OF THE OBLIGATORY COMPENSATORY CLASSES

Author: Ognen Spasovski
According to the international research on students’ achievements, the Macedonian students are significantly below the international average, having results that are constantly decreasing. As an illustration, according to the TIMSS of 2011, Macedonia is ranked 38th out of 42 countries, and it is one of the two countries having the biggest result decrease.

With a view to improve the quality of education, in the recent years, the Ministry of Education and Science of the RM has put special emphasis on the children with low achievements. Taking into consideration that the only existing, systematic mechanism for improving the quality of education of these children are the compensatory classes, several legislative changes have been made in this specific area in 2009 and 2011.

This study aims to examine the effects of the compensatory classes, that is, to examine whether and to what extent the legislative changes have introduced improvements in the quality of education of children with low achievements.

The research general impression and conclusion is that the compensatory classes are experienced as something marginal, imposed, and not very important. The compensatory classes are not among the priorities of the educational process, they are not something to which the schools draw their attention to.

With regard to the legislative changes referring to compensatory classes, the wording enables their free interpretation, and the teachers and the expert service do not have clear positions for which students and in which subjects the classes should be organized. Thus, it is not clear which teachers should conduct the classes and how often.

In practice, the organization of compensatory classes is at a very low level, actually, without any significant changes in comparison to the period preceding the legislative changes of 2009 and 2011. The compensatory classes are usually conducted with students that have unsatisfactory grades (1), only a small part of the teachers organize them, only in few subjects, usually mathematics, physics, chemistry and languages. The unevenness in the engagement has a demotivating effect on the teachers that quite regularly organize the classes. With the course of time, their élan and enthusiasm for work with children with low achievements decreases.

Generally, the teachers are pessimistic in regard to the possibilities of improvement of the level of education of the children with low achievements. According to their opinion, these children, who usually come from vulnerable groups, have not an appropriate support from the family and have essential gaps in the knowledge. The teachers say that they do everything they can, but the reasons for the low achievements are deeper and beyond their powers. Such attitudes prove that the teaching activities and the studying are still “shaped” according to the “average student”, and the children from vulnerable groups are stigmatized as “different” who should be worked with in special conditions.

Although the legislative changes do not guarantee and do not ensure good mechanisms for conducting compensatory classes, an illusion is created by the introduction of the compensatory classes by a law that this issue is systematically and solidly regulated at the highest level, and the problem with the quality of education of this category of children and students is permanently solved.

At the same time, the teachers, as direct players in the educational process, assess that the legislative changes of 2009 and 2011 have not introduced a significant change and improvement in the work with children with low achievements and, generally, there is no satisfaction from the changes. It is a general assessment that the legislative changes have introduced inflexibility, formality and burden of administrative procedures for an issue that requires flexibility.

At the same time, the state has not succeeded in preventing the causes for students’ low achievements. And many of the causes that, to significant extent, represent generators of such unfavorable situation still exist. The syllabus is too loaded and inefficient, and in conflict with the natural needs of the children. There is no real inclusive policy and practice, nor principled policy on vulnerable groups in the schools. There are stereotypical low expectations of the children from vulnerable groups. The teachers, even without being aware, have prejudices towards the potentials of these children, thus they create a hidden attitude of exclusion towards them.

The low rate of pre-school education still represents a generator of a gap between the children from vulnerable groups and the majority, in a manner that their adjustment at the beginning of the school is hard and frustrating. The teachers are not sufficiently trained...
and competent for work with children with low achievements and children with learning disabilities. This picture is not drastically different with regard to the representatives of the expert service whose role requires urgent and essential redefinition.

Wider consultation in the society is needed for the purpose of improving the situation regarding the quality of education of children with low achievements, through which, without hasty solutions and without an imperative to achieve a result immediately, well-thought, principled and long-term strategy will be created.

1. INTRODUCTION

The education is the primary premise for the welfare, the economic and cultural development of every society. Therefore, every community places a special attention to the education of all of the children in order to provide conditions for prosperity at individual and collective level.

The Republic of Macedonia is a signatory of numerous international documents and conventions referring to children’s rights, as well as to the right to education. In the recent years, within the national documents, by a range of legislative changes, the emphasis has been placed on the children with low achievements. The only existing systematic mechanism in the RM for improvement of the quality of education of these children are the compensatory classes, so this has been the area where certain legislative changes have been made. Undoubtedly, they are aimed at improving the achievements of the children from different vulnerable groups, in order to create conditions for their competent, active and productive inclusion in the social processes.

After several years of implementing these measures taken by the education policy makers in the country, and in the absence of any research in this area, the need for examining the effects of these policies is imposed. This study is focused on the students with low academic achievements, and the aim of the research is to examine the effects of the compensatory classes, that is, a. whether and to what extent the legislative changes have introduced improvements in the quality of education of children with low achievements.

EDUCATION FOR ALL – IN THE LEGAL DOCUMENTS

The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia and the general legal framework foresee equal possibilities for education for all of its citizens, in accordance with the international law and international conventions. The Constitution and the laws, at the same time, guarantee the right to education at all levels, for all children and all citizens of the country. In this context, the Law on Prevention of, and Protection Against Discrimination of 2010 legally provides for prevention of, and protection against discrimination and exercise of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, and at the same time prohibits any direct or indirect discrimination based on sex, race, color, gender, belonging to a marginalized group, ethnic origin, language, nationality, social background, religious beliefs, other types of beliefs, education, political affiliation, personal or social status, mental and physical impediment, age, family or marital status, property status, health condition or any other basis that is prohibited by law or international agreement1.

At the same time, the Republic of Macedonia is a signatory to all, more significant international conventions and declarations referring to human rights, children’s rights and rights to education. Among the international documents on human rights whose signatory is the Republic of Macedonia are: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In addition to the legal framework, the education policy makers in the RM, in the recent years, have prepared a range of strategic documents in order to develop a constructive and thorough action directed towards improvement of the quality of education of all members of the society. It is stated in the National Strategy

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for the Development of Education 2005 – 2015\(^2\) that the global aim of the Macedonian society is education for all, ensurance of educational equality, and increase of educational, cultural and economic competence of the Macedonian society. The Millennium Development Goals\(^3\) states that all children should be able to finish their primary and secondary education up to 2015. The Strategy for the Roma People in RM\(^4\), a document prepared by the Government of the RM and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, anticipates an entry rate of 100% of Roma children in the primary education for the period 2009-2011.

When VMRO DPMNE came to power in 2006, the Government and the Ministry of Education and Science placed a special emphasis to education, and at the same time, several campaigns were conducted. Improvement of the education of children with low achievements was established among the main goals. In this area, in the recent years, legislative solutions that foresee compulsory counseling of parents of the children who are absent from school or have low achievements have been adopted, as well as legislative changes in the regulation of the compensatory classes. Namely, the Amendments to the Law on Primary Education of 2011\(^5\), Article 2, read:

“(1) Compensatory classes shall be organized for students with continuous low performance, and particularly if:

- they have at least two low grades,
- they have low performance in a certain subject,
- they are absent from the classes in a particular subject, and
- the student or his/her parent, that is, guardian requires so.

(2) The teacher who teaches the subject shall oblige the students referred to in paragraph (1) line 1 of this Article to attend compensatory classes, and as for the students referred to in paragraph (1) line 2 and 3 of this Article, the compensatory classes shall be organized at the discretion of the teacher.”

These changes were adopted with an expectation that they would lead to increase of quality of education of all children, and special expectations were placed in relation to the children from different vulnerable groups as potential students with low academic achievements.

It results from all of these documents that the strategic goal of the Republic of Macedonia as a state, and the strategic goal of the Government, is improvement of the quality of education of all of the children, as well as lowering of the differences in the level of education between the majority and the children from different vulnerable groups. At the same time, it may be concluded that the general legal framework in RM ensures conditions for development of the education for all of the members of the society, as a precondition for general welfare at the level of an individual and at the level of the wider community. Therefore, it is of national interest to respond to the question, whether Macedonia succeeds in the achievement of these goals and in the implementation of these provisions.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE STUDENTS IN THE RM

The education is a measurable category, and the effects of education directly build in the scientific, economic and cultural parameters of the society. With regard to the fact that the education is the basis for development of every society, there are a range of methods in the world for measuring the level of education and the level of academic achievements at the global level. They are an exceptional opportunity to examine how efficient and constructive the current policies in the sphere of education in particular states are, since they make it possible to compare the academic achievement in the same areas, with the same measures, among children from different parts of the world. At the same time, they are an exceptional opportunity for having an insight in the weaknesses and for correction of the policies, by analyzing which measures are successful, and which are unsuccessful, in similar and different social environments.

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What are the academic achievements of the children in the Republic of Macedonia at these international comparative studies? Whether the children in the Republic of Macedonia have high academic achievements, and whether they achieve the best they can? Whether the state strategies, laws and provisions and their implementation make it possible to improve the academic achievements of the children in the Republic of Macedonia?

In the last two decades, the Republic of Macedonia has been included in several international studies for students’ academic achievements. Among them are: the Programme for International Student Assessment - PISA, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study - TIMSS, and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

These international assessments of students’ achievements are made periodically, but the Republic of Macedonia has not participated in all the rounds. However, in the ones in which it participated, the results of the participants from Macedonia were significantly below the international average. In the PISA assessment of 2000, Macedonia was ranked 30th out of the total of 35 countries. In the TIMSS’ studies conducted in 1999 and 2003, Macedonia was ranked 31st out of a total of 45 participating countries. In PIRLS in 2001, Macedonia was ranked 29th out of a total of 35 countries, and in 2006 it was ranked 38th out of a total of 45 countries.

As an illustration of the students’ achievements, in the PIRLS study of 2001, only 10% of our students, according to the achievements, are among the higher 25% of students at international level, and 55% of our students are in the lower quarter of achievements at international level! So, the achievements of our students are far below the achievements of their peers from other countries. At the same time, according to the State Statistical Bureau of RM, that year, over 60% of our students had excellent grades. Out of such results, we should expect a big part of these students to be among the students with highest achievements at international level too. But, only 3% of our students achieved the highest international level.

In the last years, the RM has participated only in the TIMSS study conducted in 2011. In the TIMSS-sciences of 2011, the Republic of Macedonia was the only developing country having a decrease. In this context, it is necessary to make a distinction between the dynamics in the achievements of the students in the developed countries and the developing countries. Namely, it is understandable that the developed countries which have a high rate of development in the sphere of education and have achieved high standards in the last decades, cannot maintain such an increase for a long continuous period. Unlike the developed, the developing countries that do not have a high economic standard, have not invested in the education more intensively until the last decades, and it is reflected in the increase of the TIMSS measures (as well as at the other testing). It is quite understandable that at the first measurements done 15-20 years ago, these countries had relatively low achievements, but by the general development of the society, they have progressed regarding the measures for education of their children. This is the case with almost all the developing countries, but not with the Republic of Macedonia. Macedonia in the TIMSS-sciences was ranked 38th out of 42 countries, behind countries like Syria, Palestine, Oman and others. It is one of the two countries which have the biggest decrease of the measures in comparison with the previous testing, a decrease of 51 points in comparison to 1999 (Macedonia in 2011 had a score of 407, and the referential score of the study was 500). In additional to the fact that the Republic of Macedonia is the only developing country that has a decrease of the measures of the TIMSS-sciences in 2011, it is among the few countries that have a decrease of measures at TIMSS-mathematics as well, along with Jordan, Romania, Thailand, Tunis and others. Additional concern is the data that Macedonia is among the few countries where the percentage of students that have shown extremely low performance in this study is between 15 and 25%, along with Iran, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Syria and Oman. In such a case, the authors of the study from the prestige Boston College recommend that all of the results are to be taken with a certain reservation. Namely, such a high percentage of extremely low achievements is an indicator that the gap between the requirements posed at the testing and the potentials (skills) of the students is too big, and this is the rea-

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son why the reliability of the achieved measures is disputable. The measures at the TIMSS-mathematics continuously decrease, for 9 points in comparison to 2003, and for 21 points in comparison to 1999. The distribution of students from the RM according to the achievements among all students at international level is disappointing. Only 2% are among the students with the highest level of achievement at international level at the TIMSS-sciences, and only 3% in the TIMSS-mathematics.

On the other hand, for the same 2011, the domestic grades of our students were again quite high. Namely, although the teachers had made the criteria stricter by the introduction of the external examination, the statistical indicators from the newest report of the State Statistical Bureau show that, at the end of 2010/11, almost half of the total number of students from fifth to eight grade had completed them with excellent grades, that is, 55861 out of the total of 115598 students, or 48,3% (SSB, 2012).

EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH LOW ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

In a situation where the academic achievements of the students in the RM continuously decrease, the question of how the education policy makers cope with this problem is raised. Also, if the quality of education decreases in general, we may assume that the situation is even more worrying regarding the children from the most vulnerable groups, whose conditions for education are at the lowest level. With regard to children with continuous low academic achievements, or achievements that are below their intellectual potentials, actually, the system should compensate the most of the things that they cannot be provided with by their family and environment.

How the state and the educational system cope with the problem of education of children with low achievements?

The only mechanism of the state for improvement of the achievements and the quality of education of these children are the compensatory classes. In 2009, by the amendments to the Law on Primary Education, the compensatory classes as a compulsory activity were introduced by law.

The question is posed, weather the activities taken are efficient, and weather the education of children with low achievements is improving. What does the state do in order to provide conditions for their quality education, thus allowing them competent and equal inclusion in the social processes and the labor market? The practice shows that a big number of the children that had an unsuccessful history in school, experience of failures and exclusion, seek alternative ways for satisfying the need of self-accomplishment and the need of personal identity confirmation in the later years. These ways are often delinquent. Many others, who are uncompetitive at the labor market and unemployed for a long time, and especially in an economic situation as in the RM, they become seekers of state benefits, to the burden of the state social protection programs. And most importantly, the potential of thousands of children – and later of young people is irreversibly lost, their opportunities to have dignified and happy life are lost.

In the absence of visible and measurable indicators for the situation regarding the quality of their education, in the absence of studies addressing this issue, the need to research the situation in education of children with low achievement is imposed. This situation and issues determine the problem of the research.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Starting from the current situation regarding the quality of education of the children with low achievements, and in the absence of relevant research in this area, the aim of the study is to examine the effects of the measures taken by the education policy makers in the state in regard to the improvement of the education of the students with low achievements. Having this particularly vulnerable group of children in its focus, the following issues will be more precisely examined:

- What is the efficiency and the implementation of the compensatory classes?
- Do the compensatory classes achieve the planned role and function, to improve the quality of education of all children that show results below their potentials?
- Do the compensatory classes as a mechanism make it possible to prevent and overcome the causes of low achievements? Do the compensatory classes appropriately address the needs of different categories of students with low achievements?
- Are the compensatory classes consistently conducted in regard to the whole syllabus?
2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, empirical research was conducted in the period October - December 2012. The field research was conducted in November and December. The research was conducted in 17 primary schools from all regions of the Republic of Macedonia. At the same time, account was taken to include schools from municipalities and areas with different infrastructural and socio-economic parameters, relevant for the category of children from vulnerable groups. Thus, schools from urban and rural areas, schools where the classes are conducted in one or more languages, as well as schools with significant number of Roma students and schools with insignificant number of Roma students were included. More precisely, the schools selected were from the municipalities of Veles, Kicevo, Kocani, Kumanovo, Ohrid, Prilep, the municipalities in the city of Skopje, Strumica and Tetovo. Such selection aimed at forming a sample for examining the conducting and the effects of the compensatory classes in the schools with different risk factors for the quality of education. The representation of the schools per category is presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Schools in total</th>
<th>Urban schools – rural schools</th>
<th>Significant no. of Roma students – without Roma students</th>
<th>One teaching language – more teaching languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>rural</td>
<td>with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers, representatives of the expert service and students participated in the research. Quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in the study. All the teachers in all the schools who were at their jobs that day were included in the quantitative research. If the school was working in shifts, both shifts were included. In this occasion, a questionnaire for the education of children with low achievements, prepared by the author of this study, was distributed. The instrument was composed of questions that examine the familiarity with the provisions referring to compensatory classes, the manner of conducting compensatory classes, in terms of which teachers conduct compensatory classes and with which students, the manner of selection and the number of students at compensatory classes, the assessment of the efficiency of compensatory classes and the legislative changes regarding compensatory classes, questions in relation to the difficulties and problems in conducting compensatory classes, the assessment of the (un)even engagement of teachers in compensatory classes and the possible consequences, the assessment of the personal competences and qualifications for work with children with learning disabilities, or children with special educational needs, the role of the expert service in the work with children with low achievements, and questions for examining the opinion of the teachers regarding the numerical compared to the descriptive evaluation, as well as regarding the grade repetition.

438 teachers in all subjects participated in the quantitative research, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Representation of teachers per subjects, in percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>subjects</th>
<th>natural sc.</th>
<th>social sc.</th>
<th>technical sc.</th>
<th>languages</th>
<th>art and gym</th>
<th>class teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>representation of teachers in percentage</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The representation of the teachers in the quantitative research, per subjects they teach, is presented also in Chart 1.
Within the framework of the quantitative research, focus group discussions with six to eight teachers, on the same main topics included in the questionnaire, were organized in all of the schools. The focus groups were of mixed composition, that is, involved class and subject teachers (different subjects). The teachers who participated in the focus groups did not fill in the questionnaire in order not to be prepared for the discussion topics in advance. Around 120 teachers participated additionally in the focus group discussions.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews on the same topics were conducted with at least one representative from the expert service (or a director) in each school.

Focus group discussions on topics related to conducting compensatory classes with six to eight students with low achievements were also conducted in all the schools. Approximately 100 students from seventh or eight grade in total participated in these discussions.

3. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The results from the research are analyzed through the prism of several topics, which at the same time, form particular wholes in the interpretation of the findings. The main topics for analysis are: the familiarity of the teachers with the provisions referring to compensatory classes; analysis of the conducting of the compensatory classes from different aspects; the difficulties and problems in conducting compensatory classes; analysis of the efficiency of the compensatory classes and the legislative changes regarding compensatory classes, as well as an assessment of the satisfaction with the changes; challenges faced with in the implementation of compensatory classes, that is, faced with by the education policy makers in the RM.

FAMILIARITY OF THE SCHOOL STAFF WITH COMPENSATORY CLASSES

Firstly, it has been checked how clearly the teachers are informed about the provisions of the law, that is, whether it is clear to the teachers for which students the compensatory classes are envisaged. The level of precision and unambiguity in the interpretation of this provision determines the actual situation in terms of which teachers actually conduct compensatory classes, how regularly and for which students.

As high as 88% of the teachers in the quantitative research responded that the compensatory classes are prescribed for all students whose performance in certain subjects is lower than their potentials – which does not necessarily mean unsatisfactory grade (1), and not only for students having an unsatisfactory grade (1). Based on this, it is logically assumed that the compensatory classes should be conducted by all teachers having students that can achieve more than they have performed in the subject they teach. Still, at the very next question where the focus is on the teachers who should conduct compensatory classes, there is a visible inconsistency in the responses and in the attitude towards the compensatory classes. Namely, the response of over 30% of the teachers to the question “whether it is prescribed that compensatory classes should be conducted (a) only by the teachers that have students with low performance in their subject, or (b) by all teachers” – was “only by the teachers that have students with low performance in their subject” (Table 3). Although the term prescribed is used in the wording of both questions, which should not leave a large space for free interpretations, still the interpretations of the first two questions, posed one after another, are different. Furthermore, the response of more than 30% of the teachers to the question about how often they conduct compensatory classes was “if needed”, although the previous dominant answers were that the compensatory classes should be conducted “for all children that have not achieved their potential, and should be conducted by all the teachers”, for which there is a real possibility taking into consideration that the compensatory classes are prescribed as obligatory with one class a week for all the teachers, who are obliged to prepare and submit an annual schedule with one class a week.
Table 3. Responses of the teachers to the question for which students the compensatory classes are prescribed, per subjects, in percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In percentage</th>
<th>Total out of the full sample of teachers</th>
<th>Urban schools – rural schools</th>
<th>Significant no. of Roma students – without Roma students</th>
<th>One teaching language – more teaching languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>with</td>
<td>without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It is prescribed that compensatory classes should be conducted:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only by teachers who have students with low performance in their subject</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This inconsistency in the responses was a subject of deeper elaboration in the focus group discussions. In a situation where the teachers could elaborate the questions more freely and more profoundly, their statements show that, most often, the compensatory classes are conducted only with students who have an unsatisfactory grade (1). The exception is the practice of some of the teachers, before taking a test, to call to compensatory classes all the students who, based on their own assessment, think that they need an extra explanation of the lessons’ content, and, following such a call, students that do not have unsatisfactory grades sometimes come to compensatory classes. Still, these situations are not systematic. Additionally, when the teachers are saying that the compensatory classes are for other students as well, and not only for those having unsatisfactory grades (1), it is revealed in the focus groups that “other” usually refers to children who, due to different reasons, have missed a significant part of the classes: “...the compensatory classes are in particular for students with low performance, and they may also be for those who have missed classes (a teacher)”. The answers of the school expert service and management do not differ either: “So, out of the analysis of the law, the compensatory classes are not clearly enough prescribed. To be more specific, it is prescribed how many times a week they should be conducted. From the aspect of a director, we had frequent consultations with the colleagues about the preparation of their programs for enrichment and compensatory classes, especially about the work with the students with low performance. There is a need for precise instructions given, for example, from the bureau or any other higher institution (a director).

The inconsistencies in the responses are due, above all, to the free interpretations of the wording of the Law on Primary Education, and more precisely, of the legislative changes referring to compensatory classes of 2011, that is allows to be made. Therein, two imprecise phrases generate free interpretations, and they are “low performance” and “free assessment of the teachers”.

Namely, these legislative changes of 2011 read: “Compensatory classes shall be organized for students with continuous low performance, and they may also be for those who have missed classes (a teacher)”. The answers of the school expert service and management do not differ either: “So, out of the analysis of the law, the compensatory classes are not clearly enough prescribed. To be more specific, it is prescribed how many times a week they should be conducted. From the aspect of a director, we had frequent consultations with the colleagues about the preparation of their programs for enrichment and compensatory classes, especially about the work with the students with low performance. There is a need for precise instructions given, for example, from the bureau or any other higher institution (a director).

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they are absent from the classes in a particular subject, and
the student or his/her parent, that is, guardian requires so."
However, the meaning of “low performance” is not precisely worded. An additional problem is generated by the fact that it is not quite precise what the meaning of “low grades” is.
The second source of free interpretations is the possibility given to the teacher to freely assess whether he/she will call students to compensatory classes or not, in the case when they do not have “low grades”: “The teacher who teaches the subject shall oblige the students referred to in paragraph (1) line 1 of this Article to attend compensatory classes, and as for the students referred to in paragraph (1) line 2 and 3 of this Article, the compensatory classes shall be organized at the discretion of the teacher.”
The imprecision of the meaning of “low performance” and “low grades” in combination with the possibility the students to be called to compensatory classes at discretion of the teacher, leaves a huge space for free interpretations that differ from school to school, and from teacher to teacher. These free interpretations in the reality are reflected in a manner that in practice, the compensatory classes are still conducted at a very limited level, only for some students and only by some teachers. The current situation in relation to conducting compensatory classes will be presented in detail in the following topic.
In relation to the familiarity of the teachers with the legal provisions, the obligation to mandatorily prepare an annual schedule for compensatory classes at the very beginning of the school year significantly affects the unspecific answers that the compensatory classes are for all teachers. Since all of the teachers prepare and submit such schedule with one compensatory class a week, they uncritically and by inertia, provide a response to the first questions that the compensatory classes are conducted by all teachers. Still, the focus groups show that they are aware that the compensatory classes are conducted only by some of the teachers, and the others only formally record the classes. Faced with the question why the compensatory classes are not conducted every week, the most frequent explanation is that there are no students with low grades – unsatisfactory grades (1), or that there are no time and spatial conditions due to the overloaded syllabus.
It is indicative that the opinion that the compensatory classes were obligatory even before the legislative changes, even with 2 classes a week, was very often presented in the focus groups.

**DIFFERENCES AMONG SCHOOLS**
Several comparisons were made in order to check whether the familiarity with and the perceptions of the teachers of who are the students for whom compensatory classes should be organized and conducted is different among the schools due to potential and relevant factors. The location of the school, and along with that, the demographic characteristics of the students are potential relevant factors that might affect the organization of compensatory classes, but also the perception and behavior of the teachers. To this regard, data from the urban and rural schools were compared; also, something that may influence the perception and the behavior of the teachers is whether there is a significant number of students from vulnerable groups, children with special needs, and children with low socio-economic status, where the Roma children are most frequently included in the school. The third assumed category was whether the classes in the school are conducted in one or more languages which additionally would complicate the organization in the school.
Regarding these categories, there are no significant differences in the responses of the teachers to many of the questions in the questionnaire. This means that the problems and the difficulties related to the compensatory classes are present in all schools. Still, such comparative analyses showed that certain problems are more visible in the schools with specific socio-economic or organizational set-up. The identified differences in relation to particular questions shall be presented further in the text, at appropriate places. The differences regarding the question: whether it is prescribed that compensatory classes should be conducted (a) only by the teachers that have students with low performance in their subject, or (b) by all teachers? are presented in the Table below.
Table 4. Responses of the teachers to the question which teachers should conduct compensatory classes, in percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It is prescribed that the compensatory classes should be conducted</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>natural sc.</th>
<th>social sc.</th>
<th>technical sc.</th>
<th>languages</th>
<th>art and gym</th>
<th>class teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>only by the teachers that have students with low performance in their subject</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by all teachers</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table indicates the following: significantly larger percent of teachers from rural schools and schools with significant number of Roma students, as well as schools where the classes are conducted in several languages, consider that the compensatory classes should be conducted by all teachers. Such results show that the teachers in these schools where the risk factors for the quality of education of the children are more evident are more visibly aware of the need to have more wide-ranging compensatory classes.

In such comparison, the larger number of class teachers compared to the subject teachers consider that the compensatory classes should be conducted by all teachers (82.4% compared to 17.6%). Taking into consideration the nature of their classes and the subject, such answer is expected.

In the context of the problem regarding the instructions for organization and conducting of compensatory classes, the teachers were asked: “have you received written instructions that refer to the compensatory classes, in terms of how they should be conducted?”, and the responses of 30% of the participants in the quantitative research to this question were – yes. The reason for this voluntary answer (in a situation where such a thing does not exist) is probably that the teachers consider the legal provision imposing an obligation for preparation of a schedule at the beginning of the schools year with one class a week itself to be a written instruction. Certainly, a written document with recommendations on the way the compensatory classes should be organized and conducted does not exist, which is also indicated in the focus groups, where the participants say that they do not have any written instructions. The lack of clear instructions is especially seen...
in the responses to several questions: whether the compensatory classes are mandatorily conducted also by teachers who do not have students with unsatisfactory grades (1) in their subject; how the compensatory classes are conducted in a situation where a student has more than one unsatisfactory grade (1), and how it is determined in which subject he/she is to attend compensatory classes that week; whether the maximum number of students in a compensatory class is regulated; whether the compensatory classes should be conducted in a manner that the content from the regular classes is repeated; taking into consideration the age of the students, whether the compensatory classes may be scheduled as seventh or eight class in the day, etc.

Taking into consideration the many unclear situations, expectedly, 89.5% of the participants’ responses to the question: “do you consider that, at the state level, there should be a manual with instructions on how to conduct the compensatory classes?” were – yes.

With regard to the familiarity with conducting compensatory classes, a variety of answers were received in the focus groups without an exception. Still, during the discussions, the answers were pointing to the conclusion that there are no clear instructions. Following the statement that there is a possibility to organize compensatory classes for all the students whose level of performance in certain subjects has been below their potentials, they were asked: are the compensatory classes, then, conducted by all teachers who have students who can do better in their subjects? The answer was that that is absolutely impossible. Such contraction of what was declared and what was implemented in the reality created confusion among the teachers in relation to the compensatory classes, and made them become aware that something, which they considered clear, was actually a subject of improvisations and different interpretations from teacher to teacher. Actually, such situation of unfamiliarity and the presence of free interpretations is a result of the fact that the compensatory classes are not a priority in the education process in order to be paid serious attention.

AN ANALYSIS OF CONDUCTING COMPENSATORY CLASSES

The compensatory classes are prescribed as mandatory with one class a week, it stems from the declared responses of the teachers that this provision is clear. As was previously described, the teachers and the expert service, with a huge level of confidence and easiness in providing the responses, state that the compensatory classes are prescribed for all students whose level of performance has been lower than their potential, and for all teachers.

However, when the teachers in the focus groups were asked about the actual state of affairs, that is, in which subjects the compensatory classes are currently conducted and for which students, the discussions reveal that it is generally conducted only in few subjects and mainly for students having unsatisfactory grades (1). Even in the quantitative research – where usually the responses are more socially desirable, more than 30% of the teachers responded – only for those students that have unsatisfactory grades (1) in their subjects. At the same time, the responses of more than 30% of the teachers, although the provision prescribes one class a week, to the question how often they conduct compensatory classes was “if needed”. This possibility to conduct compensatory classes if needed, as was previously elaborated, comes out of the provision of the law according to which it is up to the assessment of the teacher to determine whether the students who do not have “low grades” are to be directed to compensatory classes or not.

After the teachers answered the first questions with easiness that the compensatory classes are for all subjects and teachers, and for all students who have under-performed compared to their potential, faced with the actual implementation, the teachers with the same easiness continued to explain that due to the fact that the students are overloaded and the impossibility to find time and space during the working day, the compensatory classes are conducted only by teachers that have students with unsatisfactory grades (1), only in some subjects that are perceived as “harder”. The focus groups comprising students discovered another huge fault in the whole system of compensatory classes too. Namely, the research was conducted immediately after the end of the first trimester, in the second half of November and at the beginning of December. The focus groups consisted exclusively of students who had low achievements, that is, low grades. The most frequent responses to the question how often, up to that moment, they had compensatory classes, that is, how many compensatory classes in total they had, were: once, or two times. Thus, the students with low achievements had compensatory classes only once or two times in the period from the beginning of the school year up to the middle of November. This data raises concerns. Despite the reservation that the responses of the students are not quite precise, they should be considered correct to a great extent. A probable explanation for such situation, which should not be an excuse, is the following: considering that the students’ grades are formalized for the first time at the trimester, followed by a period of school meetings and boards up to mid November (in the first semester), in practice, the beginning of the second trimester is very often considered as “the period of starting the compensatory classes”.
Because it is then when the students “officially” have grades and some of them have unsatisfactory grades (1). Certainly, there are exceptions to this practice, but unfortunately, they are rare. Among the exceptions, there is the practice of some of the teachers to call all “interested” students to compensatory classes (and especially those who have not learnt the content) immediately before tests, in order to repeat the content. In such situation, students that do not have unsatisfactory grade (1) in the respective subject appear at compensatory classes.

Problems in conducting compensatory classes may also arise in situations where some of the students have more than two unsatisfactory grades (1). In such situation, it is questionable how the planning and selection of students and subjects for the compensatory classes are made. The responses of the teachers from the quantitative research for such situation are given in Chart 2.

Chart 2. Distribution of teachers’ responses to the question how the selection of students for compensatory classes is made in the case they have more than two unsatisfactory grades (1).

As it can be seen, the internal agreement among the teachers dominates as a solution. This is certainly the quickest way and may be the most efficient one, but at the same time it may be a subject of improvisations, a solution subjected to the level of individual diligence of the teachers.

Manner of conducting compensatory classes

The compensatory classes are usually conducted with ten to fifteen students, and not rarely with more students. That is, they are usually conducted with all the students who are directed to compensatory classes, from all the classes from the same generation. Generally, the content from the regular classes is repeated in the same manner, frontally, almost without the possibility for individual approach toward the children with learning disabilities.

The responses of the teachers related to the activities that they usually do in the compensatory classes are presented in Table 5.
### Table 5. Activities and manners in which the teachers conduct compensatory classes, in percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>in %</th>
<th>very often</th>
<th>often</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>rarely</th>
<th>never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I repeat the content from the regular classes once again</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students do assignments and problems that they have not succeeded to solve at the regular classes</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I assign students problems and exercises that are different from the ones at the regular classes, but similar in complexity</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I assign all student different exercises, appropriate to their individual abilities</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I adjust the manner of evaluation to their knowledge</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I adjust the complexity of the obligatory homework</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from the Table that the teachers often or very often repeat the content from the regular classes, or the same exercises.

Another negative occurrence may be noticed from the responses given in the Table. Namely, 78.4% of the teachers responded that they adjust the manner of evaluation to the knowledge of the students. This is a harmful practice that is confirmed in the focus group discussions as well. Namely, there evolves a kind of an agreement where the students are attending the compensatory classes because they expect that the very attendance will guarantee a pass grade for them, and the teachers respond to this kind of expectations by lowering the evaluation criteria: “I have a satisfactory grade (2) because I attend compensatory classes in mathematics (a student)”. The non-objective evaluation decreases the motivation of the students for studying, and at the same time develops passive attitude and unconstructive attitudes towards studying among the students.

The responses presented in Table 5 differ partially among teachers in different subjects, so that the above mentioned practice is slightly more present among class teachers and slightly less present among teachers in social sciences, compared to the other subject teachers.

In relation to the different milieu of the schools, the responses differ significantly regarding the question: “I adjust the manner of evaluation according to their knowledge”. Namely, the teachers from the schools with significant number of Roma students, in significantly larger number responded that they very often or often adjust the evaluation to the knowledge of the students called to compensatory classes (84.8%) compared to the teachers from the schools without significant number of Roma students (72.8%).
Teachers engaged in compensatory classes

The following is a corpus of questions referring to the perception whether the compensatory classes are conducted in all subjects or not, and what are the consequences of the actual situation regarding this issue.

Thirty one percent of the participants consider that the compensatory classes should not be organized for all subjects, but only for few, and these most often include: mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and languages. Leaders in such an answer are the teachers in art and gym, out of whom as high as 49% consider that the compensatory classes should be conducted only in some subjects, as well as the teachers of social sciences, out of whom almost 40% gave the same answer. Seventeen percent of all teachers in the quantitative research consider that the compensatory classes should be conducted only for the students who have unsatisfactory grade (1).

In the focus group discussions, a wide range of answers were received regarding the conduct of compensatory classes, which at the end pointed to a general conclusion that “the compensatory classes should be for all students that show results at a level below their potential, but (due to many reasons) they are mainly conducted for students with unsatisfactory grades (1)”.

As a follow-up to the previous question, the teachers were also asked: do you consider that all teachers are evenly engaged in compensatory classes? As high as 53% of them responded that not all teachers are evenly engaged.

It can be seen from Chart 3 that the larger number of teachers in natural sciences (60.5% compared to 30.4%) consider that the engagement is not even, and this opinion is shared by 51% of the class teachers. Unlike them, 53% of the teachers in social sciences and 55.6% of the teachers in technical sciences consider that the engagement is even.
12 If your answer to the previous question was “no”, what is your opinion in regard of the most engaged teachers with compensatory classes? Those are teachers that teach:

![Chart 4. Distribution of responses which teachers are the most engaged with compensatory classes](chart4)

- Natural sciences
- Social sciences
- Technical subjects
- Languages
- Arts and gym
- Class teaching

The teachers who responded that not all teachers are evenly engaged consider that the most engaged are the colleagues in the natural sciences, and after that, far beyond them, are the colleagues that teach languages (shown in Chart 3).

If we go back and remind ourselves of the firm declarative statements that the compensatory classes are for all students, that they are conducted by all the teachers and mandatory with one class a week, these findings emphasize that it is an illusion that all the teachers conduct compensatory classes with one class a week. Despite the influence of the general atmosphere of socially-desirable responses, as high as 45.1% of the participants’ responses in the quantitative research to the question whether all the teachers conduct one compensatory class a week were – no. Again, this position is shared by most of the teachers in natural sciences (54.2%) and languages (64%) which can be seen from Chart 5.

![Chart 5. Distribution of the teachers' responses to the question whether all the teachers conduct compensatory classes with one class a week](chart5)
It should be born in mind that the percentage of teachers whose response was yes to this and similar questions was increased by the class teachers. These teachers, considering the fact that they work with the same class all the time and have a bigger insight and possibilities to organize the classes, in reality, conduct compensatory classes much often. Thus, in this group of teachers there is no visible unevenness in the engagement.

The focus group discussions allowed to examine deeper the perception of the teachers in relation to the situation regarding the even engagement with compensatory classes. The participants were posed questions whether a compensatory class was conducted in particular subjects and for each particular week. Slowly but surely, the discussion led to answers that this is only declarative, while in reality, the conducting of compensatory classes depends on many “unfavorable factors”. Thus, in practice, the compensatory classes are conducted only in some subjects and far more rarely. If the classes have not been conducted even for weeks, the most frequent reason was that, in that period, there were no children with unsatisfactory grades (1), there were no spatial conditions, or the children were called, but they did not come to the classes. In spite of the actual situation that the compensatory classes are conducted only in some subjects and much rarely than every week, it is a regular practice to hypothetically repeat that the compensatory classes are regularly conducted.

That such interpretation is not considered violation of the law, is confirmed by the fact that the responses to the question posed in all of the focus groups and interviews: do the participants know of a case where a teacher has been punished for not conducting compensatory classes, were always – no.

It may be supposed that the situation where mainly the teachers in natural sciences, languages and class teachers conduct compensatory classes has demotivating effects on them. Although the dissatisfaction is not explicitly and demonstratively expressed, the focus groups showed that these teachers are aware that due to the nature of their subjects or the type of lectures (regarding the class lectures) the students usually have problems in studying the lessons, and they are necessarily responsible to compensate with compensatory classes. Since the compensatory and enrichment classes are counted in the regular number of classes and are not considered as additional engagement, it results that they should conduct two classes a week more than their colleagues in other subjects, but for the same salary. These teachers do not direct the dissatisfaction towards the idea that all teachers in all subjects must necessarily conduct two additional classes a week, first of all because of the fact that such a thing is physically not possible, considering the time and spatial limitations. But, after years of such experience and practice, the dissatisfaction has negative impact in their enthusiasm in the work, especially in case of “additional” engagement required by the children with special educational needs. With all the respect for the honesty in their work, in a long term, quietly, and even unconsciously, such position leads them to avoid giving unsatisfactory grades (1) in order to avoid the additional work, the additional problems and pressures (usually encountered by the teachers in relation to the grades of their students). “No, not everybody is equally engaged and it is demotivating, since some are dying out of work, and the others do not work, but only fill in files. And when the inspection comes - they only inspect the form and papers. And we are dying.... and I don’t have time for a file like his/her, and at the end, all in the same basket. The unwritten rule is that the teachers in some subjects do not need to conduct compensatory classes. And some who have students with unsatisfactory grades (1), even when they do not conduct them, have support, so nobody can do anything to them. In the class registers the classes are recorded, but in practice nothing has changed. On the contrary, due to the schedule prepared in September, the flexibility to do what is necessary in the moment is lost, and it must be done what is recorded (a teacher)”.

Program for “fair policy” in the school

Conclusion should not be drawn from such findings that it is requisite for all the teachers to be equally included in all the subjects, since such a thing is not possible, nor is necessary. Namely, the contents of some of the subjects are successive in nature and mutually conditioned, and the missed work is hard to be caught up in the higher levels of education and causes irreparable consequences for the quality of future learning. Priority should be given to the knowledge which is a precondition for the adoption of the contents in the higher level of education, which is essential for the future education of the children. Examples of such subjects are mathematics and languages (reading, writing, grammar...).

In order to overcome the unproductive state of affairs, we recommend that conditions for “fair policy” be created at a school level. Namely, the school should have autonomy in the preparation of an elaborated program based on which all the teachers would be engaged equally and fairly. If the compensatory classes are mostly delivered by teachers in particular subjects, based on such “fair policy”, the other teachers, in their subjects, should have a constructive program for work with the students (for example) in clubs. In such a way, on the one hand, the problem with the uneven and
unfair engagement of teachers will be overcome and the danger of eroding their motivation will be overcome. But, on the other hand, it is equally important that more constructive atmosphere and conditions are provided for the students with low learning achievements to catch up the missed contents which are essential for upgrading their future education. At the same time, the other teachers will be engaged in their own areas in upgrading the knowledge and the skills of the students that have higher achievements.

In such a system, the subject of control, supervision or inspection of the State inspectorate and the other relevant institutions should not be the issue whether the compensatory classes are conducted with one class a week, since this research has shown that the institutions are powerless in overcoming this problem – due to the very nature of the problem. Subject of the supervision in such a system should be whether the schools implement a “fair policy”, and over all, whether the students with low learning achievements acquire the contents which are essential for their future education and which constitute a foundation for building on their knowledge in the higher level of education. It should not be mandatory for the school to ensure that there is one compensatory class a week, but it should be mandatory to ensure conditions for overcoming such gaps in the knowledge, no matter how many classes per week in the particular subject are required. Such a system, instead of formal measures, would be based on indicators of positive changes in the quality of education of particular students.

Schedule for compensatory classes at the beginning of the school year

Till now, the schedule for compensatory classes which the teachers mandatorily prepare and display at the beginning of the school year was mentioned several times.

In the focus groups, the teachers unanimously state that such obligation is not practical, it only additionally loads them with formalities and paperwork, and in fact it is a program which they cannot follow: “It is not practical to prepare a program for compensatory classes in advance since we become aware of what is necessary for the children while they are at class, so something different from the planned will appear for the compensatory classes. I have never succeeded to implement the program I have prepared at the beginning of the year, because the children themselves lead us towards the things we should do at the compensatory classes. Their needs say exactly to what we have to turn our attention. We have thought that one thing is going to be harder, but it turns easier to understand, so another thing should be done at the compensatory classes, so the program bears so many changes so I do not know anybody who implements it as it is written at the beginning (a teacher).”

One teacher says: “these are voluntary topics that we give at the compensatory classes” but another teacher reacts saying: “...no, I have to follow the schedule I have given, in the event of inspection. The current needs for work with the children are different from the written topic, but we have to follow it because the inspection is going to punish me for not complying with the program (a teacher).”

It may be concluded that, in spite of the request that the schedule is submitted at the beginning of the school year, it is a formal provision, many teachers spontaneously experience it as a framework for orientation and say that they do not comply with it at all since one cannot know months in advance what topics should be actually worked on with particular children, and at the same time, they do not know that they breach the regulations by doing this. On the other hand, the interpretation of the other teachers is that they should follow the schedule as a provision of a law, which again limits them to work on topics that during the school year have proven to be topics in which particular students have low achievements: “here I am strongly against the program for compensatory classes, I think that many of the colleagues share my opinion, we should not have a program for compensatory classes in advance, because I cannot be aware months in advance what issue is not going to be clear to which kid. The compensatory classes are organized if needed and are planned if needed (a teacher).”

These findings point out that the requested schedule for compensatory classes at the beginning of the school year with concrete themes that will be covered during the whole school year is not a productive, on the contrary, is a contra productive requirement. We consider that this situation can be observed in the light of the previously elaborated “fair policy”, which comes out of the views of the questioned participants that the strategy for mandatory compensatory classes does not give the expected results for improvement of students’ knowledge. “Fair policy” program will erase the need for scheduling the compensatory classes at the beginning of the school year.
PROBLEMS RELATED TO CONDUCTING COMPENSATORY CLASSES

Different problems closely related to the conditions under which the compensatory classes are conducted and with the outcomes of the compensatory classes emerge in the course of the education process. They include unpreparedness of the teachers for work with children with low achievements; then the problem of maintaining the criteria for evaluation of the students directed to compensatory classes, which directly affects their outcome, and a problem which was examined in the research and is closely related to the evaluation, is whether the grade should be repeated or not.

Evaluation criteria

The manner in which the compensatory classes are conducted, and the classes in general, results in an exceptional situation where, despite the compensatory classes, the students do not fulfill the criteria for the necessary level of knowledge of the content. Taking into consideration the fact that the children up to sixth grade pass and do not repeat the grade (except in exceptional cases), the question was posed regarding the evaluation criteria of the teachers. Namely, the teachers were asked whether they agree with the opinion that the criteria and the requirements for the children with learning disabilities and low achievements should be lowered. As high as 78.3% of all the teachers agree that the criteria should be lowered. Such an attitude is confirmed by the responses to the abovementioned question in relation to the activities and the approach towards the compensatory classes (Table 5.), where they almost in an identical percentage responded that in reality, at compensatory classes, they adjust the manner of evaluating the knowledge of the low performing children.

In the focus group discussions with the students and with the teachers as well, the statement that the children go at compensatory classes only in order to be given satisfactory grade (2) was heard very often. The attendance at compensatory classes is undoubtedly beneficial for the students, but still, these statements point out the strategy of the students, that compensatory classes are attended in order to get satisfactory grade (2) and not knowledge (“...he/she comes and asks me, what should I learn to get two, that is, not what I have to learn in order to gain knowledge, but what to learn in order to get two..., and they think that if they come at compensatory classes, they shall get two...”, all of that is comprehended – as a grade, not as knowledge..., (a teacher). Unfortunately, a kind of a “circle of expectations” among the students and teachers is created in practice. Namely, a huge number of students go at compensatory classes expecting that by the very attendance their grades will become better. On the other hand, due to many reasons, a part of which part was elaborated above, and a part will be elaborated as difficulties in conducting complementary classes, the teachers have their own “expectations” from the students with low achievements. Those expectations are low, which at the end result in lowering the criteria, low quality compensatory classes, and the low achievement students still have low level of knowledge and quality of education.

Grade repetition

Regarding the evaluation criteria issue, the teachers also raise the question about the possibility of students repeating the grade. Undoubtedly, the legal provision based on which the children up to sixth grade pass and do not repeat a grade is introduced in order to provide conditions for right psychological development of the children, development of their motivation and self-confidence.

But, within the present context and conditions for conducting the class practice in RM, the teachers have a completely different perception. As one of the teachers illustratively stated, “...it is bad that there is no repetition of a grade up to the sixth grade, so we, the subject teachers, get illiterate children. That is not our colleagues’ fault, because there were children who were absent from school for even two months, and so, the period for teaching the basic skills has passed and we encounter such children who have not the educational foundation to be upgraded. The child does not have the basic knowledge and we now put so much effort.... We do such simple assignments at the compensatory classes, in order for the child to learn as much as it can. And even if you prepare a plan, in the course of its implementation, you become aware that these children are three years back. First of all, you have to teach the alphabet, instead of giving them texts.” Such point of view, that the grade repetition should be reinstated as a mechanism, was present almost without any exception among the participants in the focus groups.

Similar responses to this question were given in the quantitative research as well, where as high as 53% of the teachers consider that there should be a possibility for the students to repeat all the grades, 27% - from the fourth to ninth grade, 3.6% - from the seventh to ninth, and only 16% of the teachers responded that they do not agree that the students should repeat the grade. Such ten-
Tendency is even more visible among the teachers in the schools with significant number of Roma students where over 63% of the teachers consider that there should be a possibility for the students to repeat all grades.

Teachers in different subjects have different attitude regarding this question. As it can be seen from Chart 6, the biggest supporters for repetition are the teachers in natural sciences, while the teachers in social sciences and art mostly consider that the students should not repeat.

Chart 6. Distribution of the teachers according to the responses to the question: should there should be a possibility for the students to repeat a grade

On the other hand, in some environments, a problem of different nature emerges. Namely, the situation where the number of students is decreasing in some schools, thus, if a larger number of students repeat a grade, according to the rationalization in the schools, there is a danger to disrupt the structure of the classes, affect the evaluation of the students, and consequently the repetition of grades: "It will be correct if every student gets a grade according to his/her knowledge. However, in conditions where we have a decreased number of students, they are tolerated, and that's it... The decrease of the number of students is evident... (a psychologist)".

Descriptive versus numerical evaluation

In the context of evaluation, the opinion of the teachers in relation to the descriptive versus numerical evaluation was examined. The responses of all of the participants to the question: What type of grades are better for the parents to identify how much their child knows and how much it has learnt, that is, to be more informed about the level of its knowledge?, where the following alternatives were offered: (a) numerical, (b) descriptive, (c) equally, both types, and (d) do not know, are presented in Table 6.
### Table 6. Share of the teachers’ responses to the question what type of evaluation they consider as more relevant, in percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What type of grades are better for the parents to identify how much their child knows and how much it has learnt, that is, to be more informed about the level of its knowledge?</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>natural sc.</th>
<th>social sc.</th>
<th>technical sc.</th>
<th>languages</th>
<th>art and gym</th>
<th>class teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally, both types</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from the Table that a huge majority of 77.7% of all teachers consider that the numerical evaluation is more relevant for the parents. Such assessment is even more visible among the class teachers. On the other hand, there is a significant deviation of the average responses for the full sample among the teachers in social and technical sciences. However, the total number of teachers of these groups that consider that the descriptive evaluation is more relevant is still under 15%. Such findings were undoubtedly confirmed in the focus group discussions with the teachers, as well in the interviews with the representatives from the expert service.

These results, similar to the topic of grade repetition, raise the question to what extent the teachers are ready for such type of evaluation, the level of their enthusiasm to carry it out, and to what extent they are prepared to conduct classes in conditions where the students cannot repeat the grade.

We think that the presented attitudes of the interviewed teachers in regard to the numerical assessment are not related to the exact problem. If we try to be objective, the reasons for introduction of the descriptive evaluation are positive, the manner in which it is implemented however is camouflaging the situations in which some of the students have gaps in their achievements in regard to the predicted syllabus. Affirmative policy that is in the essence of the descriptive evaluation: to point out the things that a student has achieved, not the things (s)he’s missing, doesn’t allow complementary mechanism that will motivate students to overcome the gaps. This is especially important if we consider that the assessment should have: to be in function and part of the teaching process. That is way it is inevitably to point out the need for quality and meaningful teacher training for descriptive evaluation of students’ achievements.

**Preparedness of the teachers to work with children with low achievements**

At the end of this part of the study where the focus has been given on the manner of conducting the compensatory classes, the results regarding several questions related to how the teachers see their own preparedness to work with children from vulnerable groups, that is, children with special educational needs will be presented.

Firstly, the teachers were asked whether they have student(s) in the class who belong to vulnerable groups, and have special educational needs? Sixty percent of the teachers gave affirmative response, and there are no significant differences as to whether the schools are located in urban or rural areas, the classes are conducted in one or more languages, they are attended by a significant number of Roma students or not. Furthermore, 80% of all of the teachers consider that the teachers that teach students with learning disabilities from different cultural background should get
acquainted with their culture.

The key question in this corpus is the question: “do you consider yourself as competent to work with children with learning disabilities, for improvement of their knowledge?” More than a half, more precisely 54.4% of all of the teachers do not consider themselves as competent to work with children that have special educational needs, that is, learning disabilities. It is indicative that the responses of the teachers in rural schools and the teachers from schools where the classes are conducted in more languages differ from this assessment significantly, that is, 68.8% and 62.4% respectively

consider themselves as competent. Maybe the reason is that these teachers more often encounter children with learning disabilities. Based on their experience, they may consider that they deal in a competent manner with the requirements the education of these children poses.

On the other hand, the cross analysis of the responses to this question, from the aspect of the subject the teachers teach, shows more differences. The results expressed in percentage are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Responses of the teachers to the question whether they consider themselves competent to work with children with learning disabilities, in percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you consider yourself competent to work with children with learning disabilities, for improvement of their knowledge?</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>natural sc.</th>
<th>social sc.</th>
<th>technical sc.</th>
<th>languages</th>
<th>art and gym</th>
<th>class teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can see from the Table that, in comparison to the average, the teachers that teach natural sciences, languages and technical subjects consider themselves as significantly less competent to work with children with learning disabilities. On the other hand, the teachers in social sciences, as well as the class teachers, consider themselves as competent in much bigger number. These differences are presented in Chart 7.
At the same time, 75.4% of all of the teachers responded that they have not attended any training in work with children with special educational needs.

ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFICIENCY OF COMPENSATORY CLASSES

The general point of view of the teachers regarding the possibilities for improvement of the level of education of the children with low achievements is pessimistic. According to the teachers, these children most often come from vulnerable groups, they do not have appropriate support from the families and have essential difficulties in learning. The teachers say that they do what they can, but that the reasons for the low achievements are deeper and beyond their powers.

Taking into consideration that the compensatory classes are the only systematic mechanism for improvement of the achievement of these children, the teachers do not have any idea for its redefinition and reform. Although in the focus groups the teachers frequently discussed that the compensatory classes cannot help in overcoming the sharp gap between the achievements of the majority and the children from vulnerable groups, there is no idea for searching alternative solutions that might improve the situation. The potentials of the children with low achievements are seen with prejudice, that is, that they are limited, so they say that “within the framework of their potentials, we do everything we can”. Based on such position, the compensatory classes, too, well are not seen as something that may introduce an essential change. That is why the compensatory classes are perceived rigidly and it is not thought of changing and improving the modalities in the work with children with low achievements.

Hence, the data analysis in relation to the efficiency of the compensatory classes reveals that the teachers, unfortunately, give very voluntary responses in the questionnaires. Although in the focus groups, very often, comments were heard that “...finally someone asks for our opinion”, they have not used the possibility to express their (dis)satisfaction in the quantitative research. Although the discussions in the focus groups pointed out many faults and reasons for the low achievements of the students, they have responded to the questions where they could have expressed the level of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the manner in which the compensatory classes are designed and conducted in indifferent manner and mainly by choosing the neutral or similar option.

So, the responses of over 50% of the participants to the question: “On a scale of 1 to 5, please assess how satisfied you are with the design and form of the compensatory classes”, and “On a scale of 1 to 5, please assess how satisfied you are with the manner in which the compensatory classes are conducted”, were “I cannot decide”, and the other percents were quite evenly distributed to the
other alternatives. At the same time, significant differences cannot be determined neither among the teachers that teach different subjects, nor among the teachers coming from different schools (urban – rural, one language – several languages, with or without significant number of Roma students).

The key question in this segment is the request that the teachers assess whether: “regarding the work with children with low achievements, the legislative changes of 2009 and 2011 introduced an improvement, did not introduce an improvement, or did not introduce any significant change”. 19.9% of the teachers consider that the changes introduced an improvement, while 62.1% responded that there was no significant change, and 18% responded that the changes had deteriorated the conditions for work with these students. The distribution of the responses is presented in Chart 8.

![Chart 8. Assessment by the teachers of the legislative changes of 2009 and 2011 related to the efficiency of the compensatory classes](chart)

Significant deviations in the responses are present in several cross analyses. Namely, as opposed to the percentage of all teachers that amounts to 18%, as high as 28.7% of the teachers in natural sciences responded that the legislative changes deteriorated the conditions for work with children with low achievements, as well as 21% of the class teachers. At the same time, compared to the percentage of all teachers of 62.1%, as high as 75.8% of the teachers in languages responded that the changes did not introduce significant change in the conditions for work with children with low achievements.

Significant differences among the teachers that come from schools with different demographic characteristics were not determined. This only indicates that, generally, in the schools throughout the state, a significant change or improvement in the work with children with low achievements is not felt after the adoption of the legislative changes in 2009 and 2011, regardless of the environment in which the school is located, the composition of the students, or the number of languages in which the classes in the school are conducted.

A correlation analysis was made regarding the relation of the (dis)satisfaction of the teachers with the legislative changes with several factors, which they identify as difficulties in the work with children with low achievements, or as reasons for the low achievements of the students. It was established by the analysis that the dissatisfaction with the legislative changes of 2009 and 2011 increases together with the increase of the significance (or importance) of the following factors – variables: The parents of the other children oppose the inclusion of children with special needs in the class.
Challenges in Conducting Compensatory Classes

The education of children with low achievements faces many difficulties and challenges. Some of these challenges refer to the education of all the children in general, but some refer specifically to the children from different vulnerable groups and the children with learning disabilities, which seem to become predetermined to be “different” from the others and to be a separate social category.

The discussions in the focus groups, the interviews with representatives of the expert service, and the quantitative research as well, emphasized several challenges which must be necessarily addressed by the society, in order to improve the quality of education and to prevent the devaluation. The following were among the problems and challenges that were most strongly pointed out: the overloaded regular syllabus; the regular attendance of the children at classes; the level of knowledge and the preparedness of the children for promotion from grade to grade; related to the last one is the question of extraordinary low level of inclusion in pre-school education (which is almost zero among the children from vulnerable groups), so that the children enter the educational process with adjustment problems which have long-term negative consequences; the lowering of the criteria by the teachers regarding the children with low achievements, thus permanently maintaining the low level of knowledge; the competences of the teachers for work with children with learning disabilities; the prejudices among the education staff regarding the achievement potentials of the children from vulnerable groups, their stigmatization and the long-term negative consequences of these occurrences; the lack of essential inclusion of the children in the educational process; the involvement of the parents as an active partner of the schools in the improvement of the education of the children; and at the end, but extremely important, the unpreparedness of our educational system for the global problem of adaptation of the children to the educational process in the time of information technology which results in their isolation.

The following is the Table where the responses of the teachers regarding some of the problems related to the work with children with learning disabilities are presented. The question is, How often you encounter the problems listed in the Table in the process of teaching children with learning disabilities?
The elaboration of some of the difficulties and challenges of the work with children with low achievements is given in detail below.

**Extent of the syllabus and quality of teaching**

It can be seen from Table 8 that 75% of the participants consider that the overloaded syllabus, containing too many subjects and too many classes, represents a problem in teaching the children with low achievements. It does not give sufficient time for repetition and integration of the content. The opinion that the children have too many classes, which results in lack of time for repetition, lack of space (since the schoolrooms are always occupied), and finally in fall of concentration and motivation, dominated in the focus groups as well. The syllabus with its volume and manner in which it is implemented (in a stereotypical and static manner, which clashes with the natural needs of the children for movement and manipulation with the things that surround them) puts itself in an absurd position of self-inhibition and self-sabotage. The teachers undoubtedly confirm that the children cannot follow the classes in a quality manner, and especially the last classes ...“We know why, I think that the children themselves are starting to rebel because they are staying at school too long. On the one hand, even the economic factor affects, because we have children who collapse from hunger after the sixth class, so it has to take a bunch of food. Secondly, the aggression increases among children especially after mandatory the staying for the younger children was introduced, more precisely among subject teaching students the aggression increases, more precisely among class teaching students the
aggression is very increased, there are more fights among the students, it is not that their number is huge, more fights are started on the way home because they are more distressed, more aggressive (a director)

The children of youngest age have 6 or 7 classes every day, while the ones in the higher grades, 7 classes almost every day, which they pass by sitting at the desk, without activities that would disrupt such monotony. But, to such everyday school day, which by itself is a reason for low academic achievements, the eight class of compensatory classes should be added. Efficiency of the compensatory classes in such circumstances surely cannot be expected. When the motivation and the concentration of children are so low at the fifth and sixth class and these classes become so inefficient, the scheduling of compensatory classes as the eight class is doomed to failure in advance. It is clear that this issue requires essential reform in the syllabus. Certainly, such changes are hard, especially in a situation where all of the actors in the educational process consider their subjects and number of classes as exceptionally important.

When we see the syllabuses, we have to consider the children as living beings, their particular age, and to consider their natural capacities. It may be said that seven or eight classes of mental activity a day is not much, but only if it is not concentrated, is not in a confined area, and is not conducted in a manner which is far beyond the natural needs of the children. Thus, the increase of the number of children experiencing excitement, distress, anxiety can be understood. Many of these children are afterwards assessed as undisciplined, which is usually followed by a classification – “attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)”. This trendy “diagnosis” is spreading as bureaucratic epidemic and becomes a serious threat in the education sector, having long-term consequences by the stigmatization in the development of children's identity.

When looking at the syllabus, it may be easily considered that within all of those classes, the children also have arts, gym, civic education, as well as other subjects which may be considered relaxing for the children. But, the reality is not such, since those subjects have also their programs and require mental effort by the children.

The problem of the overloaded syllabus, and in the context of the difficulties in conducting the compensatory classes, is closely related to the problem of free space where the classes should be conducted. Most of the schools work in two shifts, and some, even in three (in-between shift). Taking into consideration that the students in the higher grades have seven or eight classes during the regular classes almost every day, the following shift actually begins immediately after the end of the classes.

The need of in-between shifts is not usually present in the rural areas, where the number of students is not so big. But a problem related to the transportation emerges in these areas. Namely, both the students and the teachers are quite limited by the transportation possibilities and the bus timetables, which is a frequent reason for avoiding the conduct of compensatory classes.

### Working atmosphere in the classroom

The following occurrence is related to the described problem of a several-hour program which the children cannot follow with due concentration. Namely, in all of the student focus groups, they stated that they like the compensatory classes, and that they understand the lessons' content better at these classes. Taking into consideration that the content of the regular classes is usually repeated at the compensatory classes and is delivered in the same manner, the question followed: “what is the difference between the lecture at regular classes and the lecture at compensatory classes”, the students stated that they cannot understand the lecture at the regular classes because of the noise: “no, we cannot hear anything at class because of the undisciplined children (a student). It is indicative that such a response was given in almost all student focus groups. This problem is particularly visible in the schools with a very big number of students, where the noise between classes is also transferred to classes and it becomes a part of the “micro mentality” of the school. For this reason, division of the big schools is necessary. There is no atmosphere which is normal for functioning of a school, which directly affects the quality of classes and the education of children, especially in environments where the absence of family assistance should be substituted. As stated in the study Analysis of the Education of Roma People in the RM (FOSM, 2011), a cost-benefit analysis should be conducted in order to determine the state’s benefit of the money invested in education of the members of vulnerable groups, especially the benefit of its help in the development of their competences and more successful inclusion in the social processes and the labor market, compared to having them as a burden to the state in the future. Namely, according to the analyses made by UNICEF, each dollar invested in the infrastructure returns as one dollar, while the dollar invested in early childhood development returns as seven dollars.
Level of knowledge among children

In many schools, where the number of children from vulnerable groups is bigger, the number of children with potential learning disabilities is bigger. So, the number of children for which the teachers should conduct compensatory classes is big: “…there are many children in our school who should attend compensatory classes, if we take it as a generation, seven students out of each class in average, that counts for more than thirty for one compensatory class…, And there are not just seven, there are classes where half of the class should attend compensatory classes; (a teacher).

In such conditions and context, the problem of lowering the evaluation criteria for children directed to compensatory classes is again current. Significant number of the responses of the teachers to the question whether they have the same criteria for those children with lower achievement were negative. The following statement will serve as illustration: “No, we adjust the evaluation to their level. We adjust it at the level of the school, too, we give two for some general things for which it is doubtful whether a two will be given in any other school, the same is for the fives…We give two to illiterate, we make them pass till sixth grade as illiterate…You have to teach him/her the writing skills at compensatory classes, and you cannot achieve anything more…Now, in sixth grade, we learn addition, deduction, and we cannot make any progress with that child, it is not its fault, and the child is retrograded (a teacher)".

In this way, the level of knowledge among children with low achievements cannot be improved, and that poses a challenge which must be addressed by the education system.

Inclusion and regular attendance at regular classes by the children from vulnerable groups

One of the main problems related to the compensatory classes, but also to the education as a whole, is the situation where all of the conditions for regular following of the classes by the students are not provided. The following statements of teachers are good illustration: "as for the students with lower achievements, the low performance is a result of the fact that they are not regular at school, that is, if they are not regular at the regular classes we cannot expect that they are regular at compensatory classes, there is no logic (a teacher)". "It happened once to ask a child where it was, why it did not come at class and it told me that it collected bottles; the other one, that it was at market to sell products… Small children are exploited. Not because they want that, or that the parents want that, but that is the situation, that is survival. Hence, we cannot expect that child who has spent the whole day out, at the market, to get up the following day at six and a half, to come to school, to have its homework’s done, to sit seven hours, and to come to compensatory classes, that is so hard to realize. We are aware about this situation, that is the situation, we do what we most can (a teacher)".

The schools are left to cope with serious social-economic problems alone. Such are the numerous cases of child labor, or absences of students in duration of many months resulting from their parents’ asylum seeking. But, the schools, in many cases, do not have mechanisms and instruments to ensure regularity in the attendance by the students. They do not have a mechanism to impose penalty measures, and in practice, such measures are not imposed by the state institutions either. Although it is obvious that the number of children that have long periods of absences is big, they are still promoted to higher grades, and officially there is no grade repetition nor low completion rate. In any case, it is wrong to place the responsibility only with the schools. It is necessary for the society to have an essential strategy and measures in the sector: "because most of the children come here in order for their parents to be able to get state benefit (a teacher)". Such situations are impermissible, in particular because there is a clear regulation. Namely, according to the Law on Labor Relations any employment of children under 15 years of age is forbidden (except in cases of participation in cultural, art, sports and advertising activities), and the only specific provision for the “informal” economic exploitation is given in the Law on Family, where it is determined that the “forcing of the child to do a work which is not appropriate for its age” constitutes an abuse of the parental rights. However, the child labor is not a rarity in reality. This occurrence is negative by itself, and at the same time it directly hinders the education of the children. It is especially visible among the Roma population. In the name of the “understanding the cultural specifics” the child labor is secretly tolerated, for example, working at market counters, seasonal working with its parents, waste collection, and other forms of labor. Instead of being included in the educational processes, the engagement of the children in such activities has long-term consequences for their psycho-social and intellectual development. These children are recorded to be enrolled, but in fact they are not present at the school, or have occasional, low-quality classes. The National Strategy for Roma People, as a strategic Governmental document, also

9 Article 9, Law on Labor Relations, Official Gazette of RM no. 62/2005
acknowledges the fact that the enrollment and completion rate of Roma children in the primary (and in the secondary education) is a big problem.

It is a general conclusion that the inclusion of the children from the vulnerable groups is not essential and quality inclusion. Many of these children are further segregated and stigmatized, and the consequences are extremely negative. Actually, these children are involved at a minimum level in the regular classes when they learn only a small portion of the planned content. It is certain that there are many reasons for such a situation, but it is clear that these gaps are hard to catch-up.

An occurrence which is noticed during the focus group discussions is a confirmation that the children from vulnerable groups are subjected to stereotypes and stigmatization. Namely, it is noticed in several schools that lists of children for compensatory classes are composed at the very beginning of the school year, although the teachers did not have a possibility to assess whether the children in that school year are going to have low academic achievements. The explanation is that, based on the experience from the previous years, the preparation of such lists is not hard, and at the same time it has a practical value. “We have a list of the whole vulnerable group of students and students for compensatory classes (a psychologist)”. But, along with the “practicality”, such occurrence frighteningly indicates that particular children are stigmatized and are “doomed” to low achievements at the very beginning of the school year.

**Pre-school education**

It is pointed out in many researches and analyses that the low rate of pre-school education has a negative impact on the bad adaptation of many children in the educational process, which later results in low academic achievements and risk of leaving the school (FOSI, 2011; FoR, 2010). Such statement is confirmed in this research as well. Namely, 55% of the teachers in the qualitative research consider that the low inclusion in the pre-school education, very often or often, is the reason for the low achievements of the children (Table 8). Such statements were even more visible in the teacher focus group discussions, as well as in the interviews with the representatives of the expert service: “...another problem is that the children in our school come without any background knowledge. The child who has attended pre-school education has bigger knowledge than the ones that have never been in pre-school education. It has a habit to sit at class, for a working atmosphere, it is socialized... It is a little bit harder for a child who attend school for the first time to adjust and to be introduced the contents, but the children who have attended pre-school education are very rare in our school (a teacher)”.

The preparation of a systematic approach towards creation of conditions for all children to exercise the right to pre-school education is a challenge that must be faced by the education policy makers and our state in general. In addition to the big steps towards the infrastructure, this level of education must be free of charge. Although these steps seem expensive, these costs are incomparably lower that many other unproductive expenses. And at a long run, these investments in the early childhood development are going to have multiple returns.

Thus, if one of the functions of the state and its declarative commitment is to create conditions for the children to acquire knowledge and skills that will allow them more successful inclusion in the social processes and structures through an organized process of education, then the data that the inclusion rate of children in pre-school education is still under 15 percent is unacceptable.

**Free education**

The actual costs of the education are a factor which affects the regular attendance at classes negatively. Although the primary and the secondary education in the state institutions is free for all the students (which means free textbooks and transportation of the students whose homes are at a distance of two kilometers from their schools), the actual education-related costs impede the regular attendance of schools for many children from various socio-economic vulnerable groups. These costs include the costs for school supplies and materials that amount up to the amount of the state benefit which is the source of subsistence of many families.
Competencies and preparedness of the teachers and the expert service

The teachers do not have satisfactory level of competencies in order to cope with the requirements posed by the education of children with learning disabilities, regardless of whether they have development impairment or not. Unfortunately, the teachers, without even being aware, have prejudices about the abilities of these children and thus they create a hidden attitude of exclusion toward them.

Within the quantitative research, a question in the context of the competencies of the teachers was posed, more specifically, whether they have attended training in working with children with special educational needs. More than 75% of the teachers’ responses were “no”. In addition, they were asked to assess their needs for additional training in several various areas, required for efficient conducting of compensatory classes. More than 50% of the teachers indicated as highly or very highly needed the following training areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to plan individualized classes</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement of skills for evaluation of knowledge</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with the problem of attention deficit of children</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement of cooperation with parents</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with children with special needs</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with children with learning disabilities</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement of students’ motivation</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the last years there is an increasing trend, which is a side effect of the global movement for inclusion: namely, to see the “defectologist” as the solution for all children with learning disabilities, who should work with them. This opinion was, without an exception, presented in all focus groups. A similar result was obtained in the quantitative research. Regarding the question on the problems they face in teaching, in addition to choosing among the offered problems emerging in the work with children with learning disabilities, the teachers had an opportunity to add something that was not mentioned and they thought was relevant. Although the term children with learning disabilities was part of the question’s formulation, in all of the comments added by the teachers in which children were mentioned there was the term children with special needs. Simply, there is a strong tendency among the teachers to regard as the same all categories of children with learning disabilities and the children with special needs, and to see the solution for the work with them in engaging a defectologist. Actually, all answers that were added to the mentioned question by the teachers referred to engaging a defectologist. The following statement given in an interview is a clear illustration of this situation: “we also have a defectologist who works with the children with special needs, but we have also mixed with them the students with learning disabilities and the socially and educationally neglected ones. We have a huge such category and the defectologist works with them (a psychologist)

As regards the question which is the biggest difficulty in working with children with learning disabilities, a large number of teachers considered those children as equal to children with special needs and responded that they need a defectologist. This answer illustrates the general attitude of schools not only towards children with developmental impairment, but also toward children without developmental impairment who have low level of achievements and learning disabilities due to various reasons (socio-economic, linguistic). Since it is hard for the teachers to achieve a visible progress with them, they develop defensive reasoning, convincing themselves that defectologists should work with such children. Thus, the responsibility for the educational results of those children is transferred to the defectologists. This is also easy to do, having in mind that this trend fits the trend of the recent years for improvement of inclusiveness in education that puts a special accent on the special educators, that is, the defectologists. Guided by the need to strengthen their position in the schools and to justify the need for such qualification profile, the defectologists, fully unreasonably and undiscriminating, accept to work with all children who have some kind of learning disabilities or differ in something from the model of “average student”. Unfortunately, in this manner they actively contribute to stigmatization and segregation of many children from various vulnerable groups, instead of having the real inclusion of all children regardless of their differences as their guiding idea and allowing them, without any discrimination, to achieve their maximum potential. If we take into consideration that the term “defectologist”, instead of a special educator, is the usual name for this kind of staff in the public and in the schools, these children will bear a long-lasting mark of children with some kind of a “defect”. Moreover, since not all of the schools have special educators, “more defectologists” to work with such categories of children are wanted in the schools. Thus, the arguments are twisted and there is an artificially created situation in which the lack of
sufficient number of defectologists in the schools is identified as the problem for the low achievements of the children with learning disabilities. In this case, and without any critical approach, the fundamental logic, that regardless of the number of defectologists engaged, they would not be able to work physically with all children and catch-up with all the regular lecture content, is neglected. At the same time, they are not competent in all areas/subjects in order to be able to adequately compensate for the regular classes. Thus, the special educators find themselves in a special situation of being pressured to “become” the solution for many various problems. Unfortunately, most of the special educators accept such a role, believing that it is good for their professional identity. Although the expectations they face are great, they accept this situation to a considerable level and without being aware, since it means a kind of recognition, recognition of the profile, of the competence, the importance and the role to them. In time, they even start defending such positions, and although their job description is different, they accept them in order to also work with children from low-income families who due to the poverty and uneducated parents and the longer absences from school have low achievements, but do not have developmental impairment. This is especially evident concerning Roma children. Instead that the school provide a substitute and compensation for what the families cannot provide for their children, it is exactly in the school where that part of their identity becomes a “defect”. In parallel, due to the voluminous working tasks, the special educators cannot efficiently dedicate their time to the children for who they have adequate and high-level competencies. And maybe the most important is that such a practice becomes a confirmation for the teachers’ belief that the children who have longer term difficulties in learning the lecture content – are within their scope of tasks. A statement given in response to the question whether and to what extent the teachers feel competent to meet the requirements concerning the education of children with special educational needs illustrates this point: “I think that the work with these children upsets them (the teachers). They want to help, but compassion alone is not enough. Skills and knowledge are needed, and this makes them a little bit upset, since they want to help. Those are children who have older or younger brothers and sisters in our school and they matter to them…. knowing their families, the colleagues want to help, but this is going hard for them. For example, we have two children with autism and we have no progress whatsoever with them in the last two years. They are now in the forth grade (a director)”.  

The role of the expert service

Based on the described findings, we conclude that the role of the expert service needs to be seriously reconsidered. Their engagement with children for educational purposes, including the work with children with low achievements is extremely limited, so that in schools where the number of such students is bigger, it is assessed as fully inefficient. Even more serious reason for concern is that the teachers do not perceive the expert service as a factor which can contribute substantially to raising the quality of education of children with low achievements. In the predominant model of teaching focused on the “average student”, the expert service is considered as a special section which exists for those students who “do not fit” in such a model or pattern.

The teachers were posed a question inquiring about their perception of the role and place of the expert service in the educational process. Namely, they were asked whether their activities should also be in the classroom where they would work and help the teachers in teaching children with learning disabilities, or they should continue working with such children separately, in their offices. Thus, 27.8% of all teachers responded that the persons from the expert service should work with the students in the classroom during the working hours and during classes, in order to achieve better results with the children with learning disabilities. In contrast, 72.2% think that they should work with the students separately in their offices. There is a significant discrepancy between these findings valid for the whole sample and the views of several groups of teachers, in the way that a larger proportion of them think that the persons in the expert service should spend most of their working hours and during classes working with students in the classrooms. These are the teachers of natural (33.7%) and social sciences (42.4%), as well as the teachers who work in schools in rural areas (38.5) and in schools with several teaching groups of teachers, in the way that a larger proportion of them think that the persons in the expert service should spend most of their working hours and during classes working with students in the classrooms. These are the teachers of natural (33.7%) and social sciences (42.4%), as well as the teachers who work in schools in rural areas (38.5) and in schools with several teaching languages (32.4%).

If we take into account that the idea that “persons from the expert service should work during most of their working hours with students during classes in the classrooms” is completely new for most of the teachers, contrary to the long-lasting practice, an idea which they have not thought about at all before and to which they are not accustomed, these numbers are, nevertheless, high and point to the need to seriously reconsider the role of the expert service. It follows from the focus group discussions with the teachers that the results of the work of the expert service regarding the improvement of the level of acquired education of the children with low achievements are negligible. In most of the cases, this is not
Their professional identity of psychologists, pedagogists, special educators, still predominantly called “defectologists”. This statement is especially valid for the special educators, who “take out of the class” the children with most problems from the point of view of learning disabilities and then work with them separately. If there are several children with learning disabilities, then their reasoning is that more persons in the expert service are required. The idea to work on individual basis with all children in the class and have the colleagues from the expert service help in the process – is unknown. But, a considerable number of teachers, which is near to one third, consider that they, in their current role, are inefficient. On the other hand, we think that the high number of responses according to which the colleagues from the expert service should work separately in their offices with the students with learning disabilities is a result of the teachers’ resistance to accept the responsibility for the work with those children. It is a result of the embedded practice and the attitude towards all those who differ from the average (and with whom it is more difficult to work), for which there are a lot of excuses used. Thus, as if based on a silent agreement between the teachers and the expert service, the teachers are “released” from the duties to work with children with learning disabilities, while, at the same time, the representatives of the expert service receive a confirmation of their exclusive professional profile. This statement is especially valid for the special educators, still predominantly called “defectologists”.

In addition, the new changes in the description of the working tasks of the expert service legitimized in practice the possibility that they are constantly engaged with regular administrative work in the schools. As said by one teacher, “they are not adequately used, since they are mostly dealing with administrative work”. In time, their professional identity of psychologists, pedagogists, special educators or social workers changes, their sensibility and skills required for work on specific problems within their professional domain weakens, the competencies are not developed and therefore, in time, they unavoidably take on the role of a managerial service or administrators in the schools. If we take into account the frequent changes of the directors of the schools, as well as their need for assistance in many areas related to managing the school, the representatives of the expert service turn into their assistants, instead of doing their work for which they have been educated and are the most competent. Due to such long-lasting practice and the gradual loss of sensibility and work routine, in practice, the school is left without a psychologist or without a pedagogist.

The teaching, natural needs of the children and (social) isolation of children

The voluminous program that is taught in a stereotype and static manner, which is contrary to the natural needs of the children for movement and manipulation of things in their environment, raises not only concerns about its efficiency, but also generates far-reaching and serious consequences. This is a global problem with the education of children in the modern society. To a significant extent, the low level of achievements of many children are actually a consequence of the failure of education to adjust to their natural needs, or vice versa, of the failure of children and their natural needs to adjust to the system of education. Hence, 87% of the teachers respond that one of the reasons for the problems in working with children with learning disabilities is that the children lack persistence in learning (Table 8).

The manner in which the education is delivered in practice does not allow the children to satisfy their immanent psychological need to interact with the environment, to intentionally act upon it and to feel efficient at the same time. The feeling of being competent, which is a result of the successfulness, is self-rewarding per se. The manner in which the education is realized at global level does not allow the children to enter into an authentic physical interaction with the environment, to be able to exert influence on it and to change it with the capacities of their own bodies. It does not allow for situations in which they would feel skilful and competent. To the contrary, the educational process requires a control of the impulses and of the manifestation of the natural in the children. The opposite (behavior) is being qualified as lack of discipline.

However, the mentioned need is natural and those types of needs are always meet – one way or the other, regardless of whether we
like their consequences or not. In our modern way of living, the world of video games allows the children to fulfill those needs. In this world without limitations, the children can fulfill their need to get their own actions make an effect on the “environment”, to change it, to create or wipe out worlds in a move, to requite all frustrations “like for like”. Due to these reasons, the children are becoming increasingly isolated and alienated in the promising virtual world. At the same time, the structure of education is such that (due to evolutionary reasons) it is even less suitable for boys and their isolation and alienation in the virtual reality is even more present.

Video games undoubtedly help in the development of visualization, of the ability to understand relations in the space, of logical reasoning, etc. But they also hide numerous dangers. They allow children to feel successful due to their own actions on the “environment”. And this leads to a feeling of satisfaction in a bio-psychological process in which an increased production of dopamine in the brain is stimulated. Dopamine is a hormone which is “responsible” for the development of a pleasant feeling, accompanied by direct stimulation of the pleasure center in the brain. Such stimulation of this center, which is self-dosed by the children in video games, leads to a certain type of addiction. Therefore, the less the real world allows the children to satisfy the natural needs of being competent and autonomous in their interaction with the environment, the more will the compensation of these needs in video games be present.

Unfortunately, the alienation in the virtual world has consequences for the behavior of the children. Reduced self-control, persistence, concentration are among these consequences. This, further on, affects in a direct and negative manner to the behavior, the school achievements, as well as the relations with the persons of same age and adults.

4. FINAL DISCUSSION

The quality of education in the Republic of Macedonia is constantly decreasing, which can be seen by the achievements of our students at international tests, which are comparable to the ones of the African states students. In such a situation, several questions are raised: weather the children are merely enrolled in the school or they are really and essentially educated, what actions are taken by the state to improve the quality, what kind of measures it takes and whether the measures are well thought off and efficient?

Acting in line with the aims of ensuring conditions for all children to learn, to achieve their potentials and to reach the maximum in the achievements, in 2009 and 2011, the Ministry of Education and Science introduced legal changes aimed at improvement of the quality of education, putting a special emphasis to the students with low achievements and implementation of compensatory classes.

According to the results of the research, the legal changes did not introduce any significant change, and the current solution only further burdened the teachers with formalities and procedures, they did not introduce any change in the quality, and according to many participants, they even worsen the situation present before the introduction of the Law. In practice, the only change that the legal amendments have brought is that each teacher should prepare and display a schedule for compulsory classes at the start of the school year, for the whole year in advance. The teachers experience this as especially problematic, since it is absurd to formalize the contents several months in advance where the topics and the students to be worked with at compensatory classes are not known. And regarding the implementation of the compensatory classes, many aspects indicate that the teachers who used to organize compensatory classes have organized them before and after the introduction of the legal changes, regardless of the legal changes. The legal changes even decrease the number of compensatory classes from two, as envisaged before by the documents of the educational instances, to one a week, a number envisaged now.

It can be concluded from the wording of the legal changes regarding the compensatory classes that they are not anticipated only for the students that have unsatisfactory grades (1), but for all the students that have achievements under their potentials. However, the research has shown that the imprecise wording leaves room for free interpretations that result in an actual situation where the compensatory classes are conducted only by the teachers in certain subjects that are traditionally considered “harder” and only with the students that have unsatisfactory grades (1).

The introduction of the compensatory classes in the legal solution has one serious, hidden danger. Namely, the fact that the problem with the quality of education of the students with low achievements is solved by a law creates an illusion that this problem is systematically and well regulated. It creates an illusion that, by its introduction in a law, the problem of the quality of education of this category of children and students is permanently solved by the highest instance and that the bases for permanent regulation are established. The introduction in a law by itself does not guarantee improvement, as the results of the research have shown. But, on
the other hand, the danger is hidden in the fact that such an illusion, connected with the monolithism of the institution Law, may make the relevant players in the education sphere passive regarding the search for solutions which will improve the situation, especially in a situation deprived of the possibility of flexibility, as is the case where the practice is regulated by a law and is rigid. The danger is hidden in the fact that the responsibility is transferred on paper. As the results of the research have shown, as much as the legal wording is binding, in this case, it even more creates a possibility for exemption from the obligations.

The research has again brought to the fore a problem that has been pointed out in different contexts in the past, but now in the context of the legal changes as well. It is the validity of the data in the school documentation. The schools keep records of different things, among which are the absences, and based on the new amendments, records of parents counseling as well. Under the pressure of the Law, these records are obligatory kept. But the legal changes require, for example, sanctioning of the parent if he/she does not show at the counseling.

The school and the expert service are left on their own to handle the possible problems where the parents reject to come to counseling, for example, in the cases of parents-bullies, parents having criminal files, and alike. As a result, we cannot see in the school records that that parent has not come to the counseling and no information will be sent to MIA for further sanctioning. In the current circumstances, the expert service is powerless in dealing with the possible threats to their physical and psychological safety.

The situation with the records of longer absences of students and the completion rate is similar. Unofficially, among the vulnerable groups, although the situation regarding the absences is not changed and although the number of absences is such that many of the students should lose the right to education, this is not registered. If the absences are registered, the school will declare that there is a problem with which it is not able to cope.

Such discretionary approach towards the work with the students with low achievements makes the validity of their assessment problematic. The students with several unsatisfactory grades (I) during the year correct the unsatisfactory grades and pass the year only after attending a few compensatory classes, which is, at least, absurd. It is absurd that one compensatory class compensates 10 to 20 regular classes in that month. The practice to lower the criteria for the children that attend compensatory classes is extremely damaging. Actually, many of the children at the regular classes have a concerning low level of involvement, motivation and concentration, due to which they do not succeed to acquire the contents. It means that the time passes by for the children sitting at the desks mercilessly. And taking into consideration that the curriculum is over-extensive, it is a case of too many classes spent in vain every day. With such an acquired mentality, the same students enter the secondary education, and further on the higher education. There is an increasing number of those who, not on their own fault – since they do not have any other experience, experience of authentic academic achievements – as the only model of behavior, only wait the educational cycle to end and then expect to be granted a certificate or diploma.

It is a general impression and conclusion that the compensatory classes are experienced as something marginal, imposed and not very important. Surely, such situation is a result of the lack of well thought off strategy by the makers of education practices, when the whole burden is left only to the teachers, who are insufficiently trained and competent to cope with the education of the students with low achievements. In such situation, the teachers, as defensive responsibility reaction, call the parents. And the responsibility for the failure in the education of the children from the vulnerable groups is completely transferred to their parents. But, if the state considers the education of all the children as its priority, it has a responsibility to provide conditions which will substitute the support in the education that the children do not get from their families. All the other things are closing the eyes to the problems. We can imagine how the future of thousands of children will look like and where their place in the society will be. If the priority of the state is to have future generations of young people that competently involve themselves in the social processes, that will be economically independent and will contribute for themselves (and for their families) and for the society as well, the problem of education of the children from the vulnerable groups must not be relativized and it cannot be said that nothing can be done in a situation where their parents are not interested. In such a way, we are actively creating new generations of incompetent people.

In reality, we, as a system, label many children as children with “low achievements”, as “low achievers”, which is hypocritical taking into consideration that we and the system are responsible for such results, and that we, and not the children, create the categories.
5. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from the results of the research.

- The wording in the Law leaves room for free interpretations in regard to which students should be included in the compensatory classes, in which subjects compensatory classes should be organized, and based on that, which teachers should organize compensatory classes. And the teachers and the expert service do not have clear positions with whom of the students, which teachers and in which subjects the compensatory classes should be organized. Thus, a guidebook for the teachers that will help them plan and implement the compensatory classes is recommended to be prepared.

- The research has shown that the implementation of the compensatory classes is at very low level, actually without significant changes compared to the period before the introduction of the legal amendments in 2009 and 2011. The compensatory classes are usually conducted with students that have unsatisfactory grades (1), they are organized by a small number of teachers, in few subjects only, usually mathematics, physics, chemistry and languages. It corrosively affects the motivation of the teachers engaged. It is recommended that a mechanism is introduced where the schools will have autonomy to prepare a program for “fair policy” in engagement of all the teachers in different forms of teaching, where the only criteria would be the achievement of the knowledge standards.

- The coaching and learning activities continue to be “tailored” according to the “average student”, and the children from the vulnerable groups are stigmatized as “different”, as someone who require special conditions to work with. The usual occurrence in the work with children with low learning achievements is to lower the criteria for them which, in a long term, has a damaging consequences for the quality of their education and integration in the society.

- Not only that there is no good system for implementation of the compensatory classes, but the introduction of the compensatory classes in a law has created an illusion that this problem is systematically and well regulated by the highest instance, and that the problem of the quality of education of this category of children and students is permanently solved.

- The efficiency of the compensatory classes is low. The teachers assess that the legal changes of 2009 and 2011 did not introduce a significant change and improvements in the sphere and they express dissatisfaction with the changes. It is a general assessment that they have introduced inflexibility, formalization and burden of administrative procedures in an issue which requires flexibility.

- The challenges that the society and the educational policy makers must face are:
  1. stereotypical expectations from the children from vulnerable groups;
  2. building actual inclusion and principled policy regarding the vulnerable groups;
  3. solving the problem of over-extensive and inefficient curriculum;
  4. free-of-charge and popular pre-school education;
  5. trained teachers for work with students with low achievements and learning disabilities;
  6. redefinition of the role of the expert service towards their appropriate engagement.

- Wider consultation is required for the purpose of improving the situation with the quality of education of the children from the vulnerable groups and the students with low achievements, which will create a long-term strategy without hasty solutions, without an imperative to come to the result immediately.
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6. LITERATURE


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PART TWO

SUPPORTING MEASURES FOR UNDERACHIEVING STUDENTS

(March 2013)

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1. THE INTRODUCTION

1.1 The scope of the study

The aim of the project Supporting measures for underachieving students is an overview of measures taken by the different countries in support of students with underachievement, and the proposals of measures that would be most suitable or necessary for the Macedonian educational system, with emphasis on areas, aims and measures where Foundation Open Society – Macedonia is working and where it may offer assistance.

We do not give a comparative study of all measures that are in different school systems designed for underachieving students, but only those that are suitable for the state school system in Macedonia, and for which it can be assumed in general that they can be applied and could achieve the desired results.

In some areas of assistance or possible systemic changes Macedonia already has appropriate school system in terms of these criteria and policies; in some areas of possible assistance or actions it does not make sense to focus on in Macedonia because the area does not constitute a distinct or serious problem; and certain types of measures for various reasons can’t be applied.

However, for the purpose of focusing the objective of the study, we analyse areas (recommendations, aims, specific measures) of assistance for underachieving students in the education systems of different countries that are cited in international studies and are used in different countries for this purpose in order to show on a general level the potential problems and areas that we have studied.

The starting points of the study are equal rights of the child to education. From the perspective of the rights to education of the child each child has equal rights to education. He or she should have equal opportunities to succeed in life. That means: each individual should have equal opportunities to progress in the education system and that he or she obtains the education and knowledge in accordance with his or her abilities.

Chapter (2)

DESCRIPTIONS OF RELEVANT MEASURES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

2.1 Italy

Key points: individualised learning plans, economic support, involvement of external subjects, National technical-scientific group, integration, specific training processes

There isn’t any single definition of disadvantaged learners as subjects to whom specific measures are addressed. In general, disadvantage is connected to economic and/or social and linguistic difficulties and to a lack of cultural stimulation. This general definition includes also immigrants and asylum seekers.

The risk deriving from socio-economic disadvantage is, in general, pointed out and managed at local and school level. In these cases, educative and didactic planning should consider the adoption of individualised learning plans in order to cover the deficit and to guarantee equal learning opportunities to all students.

Moreover, additional measures may include economic support (e.g. exemption from some fees) and involvement of external subjects (e.g. voluntary associations to help pupils with their homework). In case of foreign students, schools can activate language laboratories, either individually or in groups, to facilitate language learning.

Early School Leaving

In order to tackle early school leaving, a National technical-scientific group has been established in 2008 with the aim of drawing up guidelines for schools to develop guidance activities for students.

The main purpose of the National guidance plan is to favour communication and development of guidance actions at regional level, guaranteeing accountability.

The purpose of this network is to accompany the teachers’ professional development, to spread the idea of lifelong education guidance and, at the same time, to create a systematic dialog between local institutions, enterprises, labour world and vocational training.
Following intense training and promotional activity, each Regional School Office has drawn up its own Regional guidance plan which is based on the needs and the resources that have been identified.

The National guidance plan promotes the shift from a practice of guidance meant as an informative service limited at specific transition/decision moments, to an educational approach, where guidance is part of the development of individuals, and allows them to plan their life and their formative and professional future.

Integrating disable pupils is a key point of the Italian education system. Schools pursue the target of the full inclusion of disable pupils through various planning activities carried out by exploiting professionalism in the school and local resources.

In 2009, the Ministry of education has published the ‘Guidelines for the integration of disable pupils at school’, with the purpose of increasing the quality of educational interventions for pupils with physical, psychic and sensory deprivations. The document, besides confirming the principle of the full integration of disable pupils in mainstream education, goes along the stages of interventions put into place with the purpose of evaluating their correspondence to the principles and dispositions regulating this matter.

Law 170/2010 has recognised dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography and dyscalculia as Specific Learning Disabilities.

For this purpose, specific training processes have started, in particular for those who are responsible, at regional and provincial level, for guidance activities at the Regional School Offices and for secondary teachers.

2.2 Austria


Definition of the Target Group(s)

Pupils whose family language is not identical with the language of instruction (= German)

Social benefits

Social benefits for pupils include free schoolbooks and public transportation to school at a low cost (parents/guardians pay EUR 19.60 per school year). In the case of asylum-seeking pupils, the company “European Homecare” carries the expenses for transportation.

Early School Leaving

Austria acts more and more on the suggestion of inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral cooperation to reduce early leaving from education and training. Recently the Ministry of Social Affairs implemented with the support of the Ministry of Education a new measure called “Youth Coaching”. The measure is put into practice by the “Bundessozialamt” and the corresponding institutions.

Youth Coaching provides a form of support offered to students at the end of their compulsory schooling (it aims at the individual ninth grade and above), which helps young people to decide on a personally suitable education or training pathway. The measure aims at supporting students at risk of leaving school, but it also provides help for students that face psychosocial problems. The participation in Youth Coaching is voluntary for the students but schools are requested to facilitate the identification of students at risk and to notify the identified pupils to the Youth Coaches who are social workers or psychologists with special training in counseling.

The Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture focuses currently on the professionalization of teachers to recognize students at risk early enough and to provide intensified career counseling.

Pre-Primary Education

As of the year 2009/2010 which started in September, half-day attendance at kindergarten (20 hours per week without lunch) has become free of charge for children in the last year before starting primary school. The aim of an agreement reached between the federal government and the laender is to remove barriers to kin-
dergarten attendance at pre-school age and to give all children an opportunity to benefit from this support measure.

As of the year 2010/2011, half-day attendance at kindergarten (minimum of 16 hours) will become mandatory from September to June with the exception of school holidays for children having completed five years of age by 31 August. In addition to school holidays and off-school days, leave of absence amounting to 3 weeks may be taken.

Learners with Special Needs

Foreseen measures:

- Smaller classes for more attention to each child are an important basis for a successful relationship between teacher and pupil. The project ‘25 Plus’ is being implemented also in schools with inclusive education and special needs schools.
- Targeted special needs tuition at individual schools.
- With the help of the ‘Clearing’ scheme, young people with disabilities or special needs and their parents are provided with insights and a basis for decision-making so that they develop career prospects at the highest possible level and can optimise the necessary steps.

2.3 Denmark

Early leavers from education and training

The educational institutions are working intensively to reduce the drop-out rate in the Danish educational programmes. Among other things, work is directed at targeted guidance, nice study environments and varied teaching methods, hereunder how the use of IT can support the teaching being targeted to different learning behavior in pupils and students. In the area of vocational education, all schools have to prepare an action plan for an increased completion rate and in 2011 the initiatives were especially targeted towards more apprenticeships, teaching development, guidance, mentoring, personal and social efforts as well as upgrading of teachers.

2.4 Bulgaria

Key points: a two-year mandatory pre-school education, an all-day education organization, direct financial grant, “Enrollment Schools”, National Strategy

The Programme for development of education, science and youth policies in Bulgaria (2009-2013) sets the following strategic goals: Ensuring equal access to education and opening up the education system. Measures have been contemplated for reducing the number of students left out or dropping out within the age for mandatory education. In performance of the targets set, a two-year mandatory pre-school education was introduced from the 2010/2011 school year which comprises children aged 5 and 6. In order to prevent dropping out of school and ensuring equal access to education, an all-day education organization was introduced for first-grade students, which in the 2011/12 school year will also include second-grade students and will expand by stages. Considering the need for preventing early school leaving, under Human Resources Development Operational Programme on 04.11.2008 a procedure for direct financial grant was launched on scheme: Education services for students lagging behind the education and for gifted children. The main measures contemplated in the project are as follows:

- Additional work (4 hours a week) with students (grade 1 to 4) for overcoming gaps and lagging behind the teaching material. It is contemplated to include children at pre-school age, mostly those whose family language is not Bulgarian. The project will cover at least 2000 children and students;
- Training of teachers working with children from the target group, at least 2 seminars with 2 training modules each, for working with children whose family language is not Bulgarian and with children having training problems;
- Adapting information system for collecting and maintaining a database of children who have dropped out of school or who are at risk of dropping out.

Since the issue of early school leaving is especially reflected among the Roma population, the so-called “Enrollment Schools” were introduced where practical desegregation takes place since the classes include 5 to 6 children of Romani origin who are educated in the competitive environment of children from the majority. An effective and efficient measure is the work on improving the
quality of education in segregated schools. Efficiency is reported based on external evaluation of the students’ knowledge by external assessment in fourth grade which has been conducted in the Bulgarian education system since the 2006-2007 academic year.

A National Strategy for Reducing the Number of Early School Leavers by 2020 will be elaborated by the end of 2012. The draft of the Strategy envisages the following possible areas of intervention: monitoring of early school leaving including a detailed analysis of data and developing long-term policies for prevention, intervention, compensation of early school leaving, as well as specific work with teachers, trainers and people working with young people, with the parents and local communities. The Strategy will improve the coordination and interaction between the institutions.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

The most important reform in the field of pre-primary education is the introduction of compulsory age for entering pre-school preparation, i.e. 5 years of age. This reform is linked to the efforts of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science to prevent early school leaving.

The Care for Every Student National Programme, module for ensuring supplementary education to students for increasing the level of their achievements in general education, was adopted in 2008 and has been implemented annually. The beneficiaries of the programme are municipal and state-owned schools which were invited through the regional education inspectorates based on the results of external evaluation. The objectives of the programme module specified above are as follows:

- providing an opportunity for supplementary education of children having problems learning the teaching material;
- motivating teachers for work with the students, taking into account their individual abilities and interests;
- promoting the implementation of innovative approaches in teaching and learning for children having different abilities.

2.5 France

Early Leavers from Education and Training

Reforms in upper secondary education applicable in 2008 and 2010 (reform of professional lycée and reform of general and technological lycée) set out measures to reduce the school drop-out rate, by improving guidance, reinforcing personalised help, personalising school courses and creating gateways between the different branches.

Pre - Primary Education

Practically all 3-6 year olds (and a small share of 2 year olds) currently attend nursery school. Reforms in pre-primary education are focused on learning of the French language by all children. New curricula for nursery school were enforced in 2008, accompanied by training actions for teachers on the national training rather than académies’ level.

In the years 2010-2011 and 2011-12, actions to improve schooling of special needs pupils will rely on four levers: reinforced cooperation between schools and medico-social institutions; increase in the number of adviser-teachers; continued creation of localised units for educational inclusion in secondary education (ISCED 2 and ISCED 3); development of resource hubs for French sign language in each académie.

2.6 Estonia

Key points: proper environment, availability of specialists, individual development plan, study aid, various support systems, flexible learning opportunities, early notice, KUTSE programme, educational counselling centres

Underachievement in the first grade

- guarantee to all children a favourable developmental environment, for example preschool inside education institution;
- guarantee the availability of specialists for all children who need special help, like speech therapist, child psychiatrist, psychologist;
- prepare teachers for work with children with special needs; and prepare them for accommodated teaching and inclusive schools;
- create student home facilities in at least one school in every county. This would prevent taking the child away from asocial or other problematic families, and would sustain their contact with the biological family, but at the same
time would create a secure and supported possibility for learning and general development;

- activate the child related network of specialists.

**Support Measures for Learners in Early Childhood and School Education**

The objective of support measures is personal development of a child and taking account of individual learning needs in the organisation of study.

The following support measures are implemented in pre-primary institutions:

- individual development plan;
- speech therapeutic and special educational support;
- social pedagogical counselling;
- occupational therapy;
- remedial teaching of Estonian as second language.

The following possibilities for support measures may be implemented at schools:

- individual curriculum;
- study aid for offering special educational or speech therapeutic aid;
- studying in long-day groups;
- home schooling for health reasons;
- boarding school facilities for students with social problems;
- help from a special education teacher;
- help from a psychologist.

In the national curriculum for basic schools a school has the right to make changes in the duration of study, weekly study load or lessons timetable of a student with special educational needs.

### Early leavers from Education and Training

The large number of early school leavers has been deemed a significant problem and a set of diverse measures has been implemented in order to reduce this number – **various support systems and flexible learning opportunities** have been made more available to students, **early notice of students' educational special needs**, ensuring school safety, offering free school meals to students from years 1 to 9, guaranteeing a state-supported place in boarding school for children of families with coping difficulties, offering of **study counselling services** financed from ESF funds, developing youth work quality, preparing study materials for students with special educational needs etc. Since 2010 the number of students who have interrupted their studies has started to decrease in general education (in 2010 – 11.6%, in 2011 – 10.9%, source: Eurostat). The dropout rate in the stationary learning form has, however, decreased sharply – while altogether 1.0% of all students dropped out of basic schools and general upper secondary schools during the 2006/07 academic year, the respective figure during the 2010/11 academic year was 0.4%.

- Flexible pathways to enter vocational education have been implemented since 2006. The most significant opportunity among these in terms of avoiding early school leaving is that of transferring students who are acquiring vocational upper secondary education, and experiencing difficulties with general education subjects, over to a vocational curriculum on the basis of basic education. Students do not receive vocational upper secondary education in this instance, however they do have an opportunity to acquire the professional educational curriculum in full as well as receive a diploma from a vocational education institution.

- Learning opportunities have been established in vocational education and training for persons of at least 17 years of age lacking basic education. Curricula are focused on the acquisition of simpler professional skills. The number of students studying such curricula is low (366 pupils during the 2011/12 academic year). The reason for this is presumably the target group’s very low level of study motivation and opposition towards school as an institution.

**KUTSE programme** (cofinanced by ESF (1.6 million euros), total budget for the programme is 1.9 million euros) has been started up for drop-outs leaving school over the last ten academic years to complete their studies in vocational education (funded by the Euro-
pean Social Fund). Work experience is factored into completion of the curriculum in addition to earlier educational results using VÕTA (recognition of prior learning and work experience). All regular student rights and obligations are enforced for those continuing their education, including the right to study allowance. In 2011, “Kutse” has been extended and besides the vocational school drop-outs also adult people without any professional education or qualification can participate in the program and obtain a vocational education.

Pre-primary education

According to the Pre-School Child Care Institutions Act, local municipalities have the obligation to ensure that all children whose parents so wish have been created an opportunity to attend a pre-primary institution. In 2012, 75% 1.5- to 3-years and 94% of 4- to 6-years-olds attend a pre-primary education. Despite the relatively good indicator, there is a problem with insufficient number of kindergarten places, which had been caused by an increased birthrate, domestic migration and the building of new residential areas.

Regional educational counselling centres have been developed in every Estonian county as part of the “Programme for Development of the Educational Counselling Centre System” set up in 2008. In counselling centres schools, pre-school child care institutions, and parents can access counselling services from speech therapists, psychologists and social educators.

2.7 Hungary

Key points: differentiation, individualisation, obligatory kindergarten, Remedial activities, school districts, Meals and text book support, scholarship scheme

When calculating the average number of classes and groups, one disabled child/student shall be considered two or three persons depending on the type of disability, i.e. the maximum number of separated classes organised for them may be between 7 and 15 and the mandatory use of this multiplier guarantees the lower class number in integrated education.

In the last decade, differentiation and individualisation appeared more emphatically in the education and teaching of non-disabled children as well. According to the Public Education Act, children who have adaptation, behavioural and learning difficulties and whose individual features do not differ from the average to such an extent that on the basis of those features they might be classified as (disabled) children with special education needs but whose successful performance of compulsory education nevertheless requires – either provisionally or permanently – differentiated activities and supplementary services are also considered to be children eligible for special care.

Early leavers from education and training

In order to prevent early school leaving, a set of programmes and measures have been initiated:

- The prerequisites of elective home education have been modified so that disadvantaged pupils’ education be better ensured.
- The introduction of the obligatory admission to óvoda (kindergarten) of three year old disadvantaged children.
- The number of places in kindergartens (óvoda) has been increased; free meals and the new provision of merged óvoda-bőlcsođe (kindergarten-crèche) intend to enhance equity.
- Remedial activities are built in the curricula to help pupils.
- Remedial Education for those who have not finished single structure school (lower secondary phase): from the year of 2003 students who are over the age of 16 can enrol in vocational schools even if they have not finished the lower secondary education phase. These pupils have to take part in remedial courses in the framework of which they acquire the necessary knowledge and skills.
- The catchment areas of kindergarten and schools have been revised to improve access to services and reduce inequalities between school districts.
- Second chance programmes have been initiated.
- Meals and text book support are provided to disadvantaged children.

There is a programme for talented but disadvantaged pupils titled ‘Arany János Programme’ consisting of 3 sub-programmes. One sub-programme involves a preparatory school-year with specific curriculum and dormitory accommodation to help pupils get en-
rolled in (and accomplish) upper secondary school. Another has the same goals but in vocational education and training. The third sub programme provides extra support (specific curriculum, dormitory accommodation and extracurricular activities) for upper-secondary school pupils to assist them in securing a place in higher education.

There is a scholarship scheme Útravaló for which disadvantaged pupils and their mentors can apply jointly. Both mentor and pupil receives a grant. The scheme has three equity-related and one talent care components:

- Road to Upper secondary: disadvantaged pupils from grade 7 or 8 as well as their mentors can apply. The aim is to support preparation for upper secondary education.
- Road to Secondary school leaving examination: disadvantaged upper secondary school pupils receive a grant as well as mentoring to help them accomplish upper secondary education.
- Road to a Profession: disadvantaged VET pupils receive a grant and mentoring in order to accomplish vocational school and be trained for a profession of which there is a shortage.
- Road to Science: talented disadvantaged pupils from grades 10-13, interested in maths or natural sciences, receive a grant and mentoring in order to increase their chances of securing a place in higher education in the fields of maths or sciences.

2.8 Czech Republic

**Early School Leaving**

The Czech Republic ranks among the EU countries with the lowest dropout rate and is well above the target set as part of the Europe 2020 strategy. Over the long term the CR has been among 4 member countries with the lowest dropout ratio (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Slovenia). The 4.9% ratio (2010) is far below the EU target for 2020 (in 2010 the average for the EU was 15.6%).

In 2005-2008, the project VIP Kariéra was carried out with the support of the ESF. The project focused on the establishment of school guidance centres at 110 schools, creation of an integrated Information System on School Leavers’ Success on the Labour Market (ISA), and teacher training aimed at educational and career guidance. Providing information and counselling within the system project VIP Kariéra continues even after its completion.

The follow-up project VIP Kariéra II – KP was developed in 2009 and launched in 2010. The principal objective of this project is the enhancement, rationalisation and further quality improvement of informational, training and methodical support of career counselling and the creation of a link to lifelong learning counselling. The ISA system of integrating information from the area of education and labour market will be improved and developed. Another part of the project is to create and run e-learning training for career counsellors – eKariéra.

The follow-up project of the two above mentioned is the project Development and Methodic Support of Guidance Service RAMPS – VIP III which was launched in January 2012. Its aim is to enhance the quality of services provided at school and school educational establishments and offered by a school psychologist, special educational needs teachers and methodologist.

**Early Childhood Education and Care Education (ECEC)**

Given the fact that revenues from investment in education decreases with age of the child, investments in preschool education are considered to be highly efficient. In this context the government is increasing its support for the teaching of foreign languages in the institutions of pre-primary education. The government will continue to promote the availability of pre-primary education for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. At the same time, transformation of the system of pedagogical-psychological counselling is to be made to properly diagnose individual needs of children and propose a suitable buffer and support measures in total synergy with parents, schools and nongovernmental organizations.

2.9 Slovakia

**Early Leavers for Education and Training**

A part of the support policy in education and social cohesion is manifested in the still valid Concept of Education and Training of Romany children and pupils including the development of secondary and higher education of 2008. Despite evident efforts of the education sector they did not manage to fully remove the school
failure of Romany pupils. The sustaining reasons of this state are, in particular: low education standard of parents, diverse value orientation, in which education does not play a significant role and the subsequent low motivation to learning, diverse cultural and social background, insufficient command of Slovak language, inadequately cultivated elementary social, hygienic and work habits, not always good enough approaches of educational staff to the children and short school attendance of the children. Partial successes have been brought by measures, as for example, introduction of zero grades in primary schools, which prepare pupils for mastering the subject matter of the first grade of primary schools, employment of teacher assistant in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, change in criteria of assessing school maturity of children and diagnostic methodology to differentiation of mental retardation and lag behind, being socially conditioned, with the pupils of special primary schools.

2.10 Romania

Key points: preparatory class, social programmes, programme School after School, “Second Chance” programme, teaching tools for the Preparatory group preschoolers

Promoting Equity, Social Cohesion and Active Citizenship

Ensuring equal access to education, especially for the disadvantaged groups, targeted three important aspects: preventing early leaving in the education system, intervening to keep in the system those students at risk of school drop-out and bringing back to school those who are outside the system.

For the 2011/2012 school year, MECTS initiated some priority actions, detailed at the level of the school education system through a Roadmap, which pursues two major directions for action: the increasing the access of all children to quality education and the raising of the school achievement rate by reducing absences from school, assessment with a guidance and an optimisation purpose and improving reading skills.

Inclusive extracurricular and extra school educational offers for developing a healthy life style and an active citizenship for children in disadvantaged, especially rural communities, in the Romanian pre-academic education.

Early school leaving

- Preventing early leaving in the education system.
- Implementation of the action plan on the introduction of the preparatory class;
- Continuation of the social programmes of the MECTS for supporting students from disadvantaged groups:
- Intervening to keep in the system those students at risk of school drop-out. A success was to extend and to regulate the implementation of the programme School after School, following the development and the approval of the methodology for the organisation of the programme, and the implementation of specific activities within the project funded by the European Social Fund “Education, qualification and facilitation of the transition to a job for students and young people at risk or in a situation of school drop-out”, which has as general objective the creation of the methodological framework, mechanisms and support instruments for the development of integrated programmes intended to increase participation in education and initial training.
- Bringing back to school those who are outside the system. In 2011, a new methodology was developed and approved for the implementation of the “Second Chance” programme, a programme meant to support young people who left the formal education system without completing basic education and without a professional qualification. MECTS developed and approved new curricula for the “Second Chance” programme. Educational materials have also been developed to support the teachers and the students benefiting from the programme.
- Together with the kids for a quality school start – teaching tools for the Preparatory group preschoolers. The general objective of the project is increasing the school adaptability, associated with the prevention of school failure of the preschooler children within the upper preparatory preschool group by creating/testing/piloting digital teaching tools and an alternative educational approach in order to prepare the school start.
- Methodology concerning the organization of educational support services for children, pupils and youths with special educational needs integrated in the public
education. Objective: **Creating some support services specialized in psychological and pedagogical assistance** of which the integrated children/pupils/youths should benefit, in order to efficiently integrate the persons with special educational needs, as well as counselling services for the teaching staff in the inclusive school, the other pupils, the family, the community.

Government Decision regarding the subsidy of all costs related to the secondary school attendance for the pupils coming from the rural environment or from disadvantaged social and economical groups, as well as for the ones attending vocational schools.

### 2.11 New Zealand

**Schooling improvement**

The purpose of schooling improvement is to significantly improve student achievement through a series of targeted interventions mainly focused on literacy, numeracy and effective teaching. The focus is on changing classroom practice rather than on external variables such as change management within schools.

If existing data indicates that students may be at risk of significant underachievement, the Ministry supports the cluster to gather in-depth student achievement data, using standardised assessments, through an achievement analysis. If the achievement analysis confirms significant underachievement, the Ministry invites the cluster schools to work in partnership to develop an evidence-based plan to address the underachievement.

### 2.12 Finland

**Flexible basic education** has been found to be an effective measure to prevent social marginalisation. This activity is directed to 13-15-year-old children. They study together for two years, on the average, in small groups of 10 persons. This is after completing compulsory education. A multi-professional team is responsible for the instruction of the small group. The team consists of the principal, teacher or special education teacher and youth worker or social worker. Planning the instruction requires cooperation with other teachers and with those who are responsible for guidance and counselling during the learning periods in working life. The aim of the flexible basic education activity is to strengthen pupils’ motivation to study and to improve their life control as a whole.

The **state-owned reform schools** as children’s protection institutions bear responsibility for one of the most challenging group of children. The children living in reform schools come from very problematic backgrounds. The activities of those schools comprise of education and care provided in multi-professional cooperation. Special needs education is also provided.

The Basic Education Act entitles all pupils to remedial instruction; this also applies to immigrant pupils. In addition, extra funding may be provided for remedial instruction for immigrant pupils.

In basic education, the state subsidy for remedial teaching provides a maximum of one weekly lesson per school and a half a lesson every two weeks for each pupil entitled to remedial teaching.

In order to prevent dropout from school and social exclusion, the Ministry of Education and Culture initiated in 2006 the **Preparatory instruction and guidance for VET** (Ammattistartti) which attempts to assist young students who have completed basic education and remained uncertain of their study prospects, or are in risk of dropping out at beginning of their vocational studies. After promising results, it was decided to make the scheme permanent from August 2010 onwards. The legislation came into effect in January 2010.

In the beginning of 2011 the change of the act on basic education came into force, which accomplished the statutes on support of learning and schooling. The aim was to strengthen the rights of learner to receive planned and pre-emptive support as early as possible.

### 2.13 Sweden

Sweden recognises that more young people must complete upper secondary education with pass grades for the country to assert itself as a knowledge and industrial nation. The quality of upper secondary school is closely linked to the prior knowledge that pupils bring with them from compulsory (primary and lower secondary) school, but the way in which upper secondary education is designed also plays a crucial role. However, many Swedish pupils leave compulsory school with inadequate basic knowledge, while the proportion of young people aged 18–24 who have not completed upper secondary education and do not supplement their educa-
tion later has increased in Sweden. The Swedish school system is therefore being fundamentally reformed.

Many changes were introduced in the Swedish school system in the autumn 2011. A new Education Act came into effect, which reinforces the entitlement to special support for pupils who need it, increases requirements for school health and welfare services, augments the powers of school authorities, heads and teachers, introduces new curricula and syllabi with more clearly defined knowledge goals in compulsory school, and requires more national tests in earlier years. From 2012 Sweden has a new grading scale and grades will be given earlier in compulsory school. A new teacher education programme started in 2011, with more in-depth subject studies and tougher requirements to be qualified to teach particular subjects. In addition, a new upper secondary education system is being introduced, aimed at ensuring that more pupils leave upper secondary school with pass grades, enhancing pupils’ prior knowledge in preparation for working life and further study, and better adapting educational programmes to the requirements of different professional and occupational fields.

Measures taken to prevent early school leaving

- **Development plans for pupils with written information and assessments.** In Sweden grading starts in school year 8 (14-year-olds). However, written information with assessments in all subjects provides pupils and parents with information from the first school year onwards. The intention is to ensure that pupils get the support they need from teachers and parents, which will lead to better results and fewer drop-outs.

- **A reading-writing-arithmetic campaign.** The Government has decided on an extensive reading-writing-arithmetic campaign to strengthen performance at compulsory school level. By establishing early reading, writing and arithmetic skills in school years 1–3, the Government aims to reduce the number of pupils leaving compulsory school without sufficient skills.

- **The right to special support is strengthened in the new Education Act.** The initiative gives pupils and parents the possibility to appeal if they find that the pupil does not receive the special support that he or she needs to complete his/her education, thereby reducing the drop-out rate.

- **New Teacher Education.** A new teacher education programme was introduced in 2011. In the government bill ‘Top of the class – new teacher education programmes’, the Government proposed that the previous degree of Bachelor/Master of Education were replaced by four new professional degrees: a degree in pre-school education, a degree in primary school education, a degree in subject education and a degree in vocational education. The intended outcome is to improve the quality of teacher education. Special education is also prioritised by the Government. Although the number of teachers for special needs education has increased, school leaders and teachers still express a lack of support for special needs education. To meet the needs, the Government has decided to re-establish a post-secondary training programme for teachers of special needs education.

Pre-school provisions

For children who do not attend pre-school (förskola) many municipalities run ‘open pre-schools’ (öppen förskola), that children and their parents can attend for a few hours a day. For many families with a foreign background these function as a meeting place and provide a first step into Swedish social life. Some municipal authorities also run so called ‘special language pre-school groups’ (språkförskolor) that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish can attend for two to three hours a day in order to learn Swedish. Both of these provisions are free of charge.

2.13 Slovenia

**Support Measures for Learners in Early Childhood and School Education**

All pre-school institutions and schools have counselling services. School counsellors are psychologists, social pedagogues, education specialists and social workers. The main purpose of a counselling service is to take part in complex solving of educational, psychological and social difficulties of children in pre-school institutions or schools by assisting and cooperating with all participants of the education process, the parents and, if necessary, with relevant external institutions. It offers assistance to individuals and groups in pre-school institutions or schools in order to ensure optimal development of all children, regardless of their personal circumstances or the social-economic or cultural situation.
Specific Support Measures

Children from less favourable social and economic environments

- Children, whose parents submit a social work centre certificate about vulnerability due to the social situation of the family, have an advantage for admission to the pre-school institutions.
- The counselling service in a pre-school institution or school assists in searching and providing possible forms of support and assistance to the child’s, pupil’s or student’s family (e.g. assistance in seeking for scholarships, the programme for overcoming financial difficulties, the organization of studying space in schools, assistance in ensuring textbooks and school supplies, the organization and coordination of additional assistance to students whose parents are unable to offer help etc.).
- Schools may offer students individual or group help.
- Pre-school institutions and schools cooperate with the relevant social work centre.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

In the process of lifelong learning, pre-primary education is emphasized the most. Through certain measures, great progress has been achieved in enrolment of children in pre-primary educational programmes.

In the school year 2011/12, the number of children attending kindergarten increased by 6.9% compared to the previous school year. Over 81,000 children, which is 77.6% of all children of an adequate age, are included in preschool education in preschool institutions and home-based pre-school education.

In comparison to the previous school year, the number of children in kindergartens increased, particularly in the age group from three years up to admission to school, i.e. children in the second age period, namely by 8.0%. This means that 92.0% of children at this age are attending preschool institution. The number of children in the first age period, i.e. up to three years old, increased by 4.6% and amounts to 55.7%.

More than 36,000 of all 4 and 5-year olds are attending preschool education in preschool institutions or, expressed differently, 93.6% of all children at this age. The European strategic goal Education and training 2020 calls for 95% of children at this age to be attending preschool education (Source: SURS)

Parents cover from 10% to 80% of costs of preschool education depending on the amount of their income and assets. The Exercise of Rights to Public Funds Act, which came into force on 1 January 2012, introduced a new system of the parent’s lowered payment for preschool institution (the centers for social work decide on all rights regarding social security, whereby the decision relies on the family’s entire immovable and movable property, as evident from the official records).

However, the Fiscal Balance Act, which came into force in the end of May 2012, decreased certain previous benefits regarding kindergarten payment for parents whose two or more children are attending kindergarten at the same time; namely, the second child is no longer attending kindergarten free of charge and the parents now cover 30% of the determined payment, whereby the remaining
difference to full payment is still covered by the national budget. Nonetheless, the state budget continues to provide kindergarten free of charge for the third child from the same family, of which two older children are attending kindergarten at the same time. A discount in the amount of one wage class for the older child for parents whose two or more children are attending kindergarten has also been abolished. The act also introduces partial subsidies for the work of guardians who care for children that cannot attend kindergartens due to the lack of available capacities.

**Children with special needs**

Pre-school institutions and schools must ensure that children with special needs have adequate conditions for education – they adjust the organization and mode of the programme implementation and offer additional expert assistance. Adjusted methods of assessment of knowledge, progression through the programme and time division of classes may also be provided. In cooperation with parents, pre-school institutions and schools compile an individualized programme for each child with special needs, specifying the forms of work, methods of expert or physical assistance, transfer between programmes and the necessary adjustments in organizing, testing and assessing of knowledge, progressing through the programme and the organization of teaching time.

**CHAPTER (3)**

**CONCEPTUALLY GATHERED MEASURES FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AND THE RELATION TO THE MACEDONIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM**

### 3.1. Measures from different countries

The main objectives of support measures are personal development of a child and taking into account individual learning needs in the organization of study.

The following support measures are implemented in different countries:

1. **Pre-primary Education**
   - Ensure that all children whose parents wish so, have an opportunity to attend a pre-primary institution.
   - Pre-primary Education should be free of charge and mandatory at least in the last year before starting school.

2. **A favourable developmental environment in school**
   - Individual development plan and individualized learning plans in order to cover the deficit and to guarantee equal learning opportunities to all students.
   - Additional work with students for overcoming gaps and lagging behind the teaching material – remedial activities.
   - A school has the right to make changes in the weekly study load or lessons timetable of a student with special educational needs.
   - Involvement of external subjects (e.g. voluntary associations to help pupils with their homework).
   - Smaller classes (when a child with special needs or learning difficulties is in the class).
Employment of teacher assistant.
An all-day education organization.

(3) Education of teachers working with children from the target group
- Educate teachers to recognize students at risk early enough and to provide intensified support.
- Motivating teachers for working with the students, taking into account their individual abilities and interests.
- Promoting the implementation of innovative approaches in teaching and learning for children having different abilities.
- Educate teachers for differentiation and individualisation (preparing study materials, assessment, teaching plan).

(4) Counselling services at school
- Professional support for teachers.
- Guarantee the availability of specialists for all children who need special help, like speech therapist, child psychiatrist, psychologist (special educational support).
- Support for parents.
- Social pedagogical counselling.
- Career counseling.

(5) Economic support (e.g. exemption from some fees, free schoolbooks, meals and public transportation to school, boarding school, scholarship scheme).

(6) Flexible pathways to enter vocational education (bringing back to school those who are outside the system, “Second Chance” programme).

(7) Support measures at National Level
- National technical-scientific group with the aim of drawing up guidelines for schools to develop guidance activities for students.
- Adapting information system for collecting and maintaining a database of children who have dropped out of school or who are at risk of dropping out.
- An external evaluation of the students’ knowledge by external assessment.
- Regional educational counselling centres (in counselling centres schools, pre-school child care institutions, and parents can access counselling services from speech therapists, psychologists and social educators).
- Specific training processes, in particular for those who are responsible, at regional and provincial level, for guidance activities.
- Reinforced cooperation between schools and medico-social institutions.

3.2 General recommendations and measures supporting underachievers and disadvantaged students and schools

Especially appropriate for the general account of how to tackle the problem of underachieving students at the level of a school system are the efforts of OECD which started in 2007 with the conceptual framework developed in the OECD’s No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education (2007). On that framework builds the project Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work (OECD, April 2010) and we will use also some of its results published in Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools, OECD Publishing (2012).

The conceptual and value basis of these comparative studies and recommendations allow the analysis of the Macedonian school system and are appropriate for the purposes of the Foundation Open Society Macedonia.
In Equity and Quality in Education OECD argues that “the highest performing education systems across OECD countries are those that combine quality with equity. Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion). In these education systems, the vast majority of students have the opportunity to attain high level skills, regardless of their own personal and socio-economic circumstances” (OECD 2012, 37).

In regard to equity in education, the project links two fundamental concepts, inclusion and fairness: »Equity in education includes two dimensions that are closely linked: equity as fairness and equity as inclusion. Fairness implies ensuring that personal and social circumstances should not be an obstacle to educational success, and inclusion implies ensuring a minimum standard of education for all (Field et al., 2007). Consequently, equity in education demands that students’ expected learning outcomes should depend only on their own effort and capacity, and not on considerations over which they have no influence (gender, ethnic origin, family’s socio-economic level). The concept of equity in education goes hand in hand with the concept of equality of opportunities (Nusche, 2009). It is not only desirable from an economic and social point of view, but also constitutes a human rights imperative« (OECD 2010, 9).

Therefore, the question of how to develop policies and measures to help underachieving students has to take in account two perspectives. One is a systemic perspective: »school failure is the failure of an educational system, which is unable to provide an education of quality to all. In this case, overcoming school failure implies assuring inclusion: ensuring a basic minimum standard education for each and every student« (ibid). The other is an individual perspective, a failure of a student in obtaining a minimum necessary standard or, in the extreme, dropping out« (ibid.), or we should say, a failure of a student to obtain the education and knowledge in accordance with his or hers abilities. We can conclude that »not all individuals are equal facing failure, and consequently, to reduce school failure in a targeted way allows to strengthen equality of opportunities, and to make education system fairer« (ibid.).

No More Failures challenges the assumption that there will always be failures and dropouts, those who can’t or won’t make it in school. It offers a valuable comparative perspective on how different countries have handled equity in education. Among the issues it explores:

- tracking, streaming and academic selection
- school choice
- secondary education structures and second chance programmes
- grade repetition
- links between school and home
- early childhood education
- resource allocation
- targets for equity
- the special needs of migrants and minorities

The report No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education (2007; cf. OECD 2010) argues that education systems need to be fair and inclusive in their design, practices, and resourcing. Three key areas for delivering equity in education are (1) the design of education systems, (2) classroom practices and (3) resourcing. Then, it proposes ten concrete policy measures, backed by evidence, on how to reduce school failure and dropout rates.

The Ten Steps to Equity in Education

The ten steps to equity in education are major policy recommendations which would reduce school failure and dropout, make society fairer and avoid the large social costs of marginalised adults with few basic skills.

(1) Design

1. Limit early tracking and streaming and postpone academic selection
2. Manage school choice so as to contain the risks to equity
3. In upper secondary education, provide attractive alternatives, remove dead ends and prevent dropout
4. Offer second chances to gain from education
(2) Practices

5. Identify and provide systematic help to those who fall behind at school and reduce year repetition

6. Strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn

7. Respond to diversity and provide for the successful inclusion of migrants and minorities within mainstream education

(3) Resourcing

8. Provide strong education for all, giving priority to early childhood provision and basic schooling

9. Direct resources to the students or schools with the greatest needs, so that poorer communities have at least the same level of provision as those better-off and schools in difficulty are supported

10. Set concrete targets for more equity, particularly related to low school attainment and dropouts

In regard to the first recommendation in the area of (1) the design of education system it is possible to state that the Macedonian education system doesn’t include early tracking and streaming and that the academic selection is postponed until the end of the comprehensive (primary and lower secondary) school. Some other recommendations in the area of the design refer to upper secondary level of the school system (3. provide attractive alternatives, remove dead ends and prevent dropout in upper secondary education; 4. Offer second chances to gain from education) which are not a primary concern of this study; and we estimate that also management of the school choice so as to contain the risks to equity is not a major issue for considerations of how to assist underachieving students in Macedonia.

As far as the area of (2) practices is concerned, we have found out in our comparative survey that a lot of measures in different countries are targeted to respond to diversity and provide for the successful inclusion of migrants and minorities within mainstream education (the recommendation 7); however, the Macedonian situation is specific and without other data, our estimation is that the schools and teachers in Macedonian education system are used to manage the inclusion of migrants and minorities within mainstream education; and besides, the focus on Roma inclusion in education system provided knowledge and experience in the Foundation Open Society Macedonia which can be transferred to the questions of inclusion of other minorities or migrant groups of students, if necessary. Therefore, we have decided that it is not necessary to focus on the measures that refer to inclusion of minorities or migrants in this comparative study. The other two recommendations are relevant. It is true that year repetition (recommendation 5) in Macedonian comprehensive school has already been adequately solved (otherwise, the question would be of how to reduce the year repetition), however with year repetition not being the problem as such arises the necessity to identify and provide systematic help to those who fall behind at school. We will explore also the questions linked to the recommendation 6 - strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn.

(3) Resourcing: how to allocate available resources is one of the key questions for the state and the responsible ministry, but not so much for the Foundation Open Society Macedonia, since it can not exert a direct influence on how the available state resources are spent. Nevertheless, also for Foundation Open Society Macedonia (and for this project) one of the fundamental questions remains what would be the most efficient way of investing its own resources.

The OECD research in international level shows that equity in education is also economically efficient. It proves that investing in early, primary and secondary education for all, and in particular for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, can reinforce equity and be economically efficient. (OECD 2012, 26). Between goals of efficiency and equity the question is to find educational policies which can make education systems more efficient, without having a negative impact on equity, or policies that can make systems more equitable without hindering efficiency (cf. ibid.).

Funding of the state schools is of course a task for the government, not for the Foundation Open Society Macedonia. However, it could be useful to state some basic funding strategies responsive to students’ and schools’ needs (OECD 2012, 72–80).

Increasing resources alone does not necessarily result in school or student improvement (cf. OECD 2012, 36). Performance on international comparisons cannot simply be tied to financial resources and many other qualitative elements – in particular cultural and contextual ones – have to be taken into account. Education funds could be misspent for inputs like unnecessary or inadequate textbooks, supplies or computers, poorly developed professional learning programmes, and attempted reforms backed by insufficient resources (cf. ibid., after: Faubert, 2012).
Therefore OECD recommends to make funding strategies responsive to students’ and schools’ needs. To support equity and prevent school failure, countries should aim for equitable and effective resource allocation mechanisms. To this end, it is important that fair funding strategies:

- Provide sufficient resources to improve the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and promote access, in particular for disadvantaged families.
- Take into consideration that the instructional costs of disadvantaged students may be higher. To respond to this need, formula funding seems to be the most efficient and transparent method of funding schools incorporating needs criteria. Other options include designing specific funding programmes at the system level, although these can represent an additional bureaucratic burden on schools.
- Balance decentralisation/local autonomy and accountability to ensure that resources reach disadvantaged schools and are well spent. Decentralising educational funding to local authorities can increase responsiveness to local needs – but it may not be effective if either the funding is inadequate or local authorities lack the required capacity. Schools should keep autonomy in areas where school-level knowledge is more relevant, such as managing their personnel, while the central level should control resource levels and performance standards.

In any case, what does matter is not solely the level of resources, but to find measures which can have the most effective impact.

For the education system, the quality of the work of teachers represents one of the key questions. Here it is worth to mention that OECD research from the findings of PISA suggest that systems prioritising higher teacher salaries over smaller classes tend to perform better (cf. Ibid; OECD, 2010g). From the point of view of the education system policies the most effective school systems require the right combination of high quality and well-trained personnel, adequate educational resources and facilities, and motivated students ready to learn – and resources must be distributed in a way that allows this (Ibid., 36; OECD, 2011e).

Within school systems, PISA identifies that socio-economically disadvantaged students tend to attend schools with fewer resources, in terms of class size, instruction time, participation in after-school lessons, availability of extra-curricular activities, and the school principal’s perception of teacher shortages and lack of material resources (Ibid., 36; OECD, 2010g).

This suggests the need to consider equity in the distribution of resources in relation to schools, not individual students, teachers and other professionals per se.

Improving the performance of low performing schools with a relatively disadvantaged student intake addresses both dimensions of equity: inclusion, by ensuring that these schools can supply quality education, and fairness, by ensuring that disadvantaged students are not penalized twice – because of their own disadvantaged background, and because they attend schools that heighten this disadvantage.

However, adequately resourcing policies and programs to help underachieving students requires significant amounts of both financial resources and human capital. (Ibid. 36) The financial resources for the education system are a task for the government, but the Foundation Open Society - Macedonia could influence the quality of the work with underachieving students by improving the knowledge and skills of teachers and other professionals.

From the OECD analyses and their recommendations we conclude that for purposes of the Foundation Open Society Macedonia it would be most efficient to help schools at the level of primary and lower-secondary education and, if possible, of upper-secondary education.

The most effective and lasting measure would be to support the appropriate educational approaches of teachers and other professionals, principals and schools in working with underachieving students. The Foundation Open Society Macedonia could provide in-service training specifically designed to support quality work with underachieving students.

### 3.3 Some recommendations from OECD analysis

#### 3.3.1. Systemic perspective

Among five systemic recommendations in *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools* OECD (2012) (eliminate grade repetition; avoid early tracking and defer student selection to upper secondary; manage school choice to avoid segregation and increased inequities; make funding strategies responsive to students’ and schools’ needs; and design equivalent upper secondary pathways to ensure completion) we should highlight the first one which reveals some possible areas of improvement.
Support student progress instead of repeating classes (cf. OECD 2012, 49-54): Making a student repeat an educational year is costly and often ineffective in raising educational outcomes. Yet some countries use grade repetition extensively. There are more efficient policy options to grade repetition that contribute to improved results:

- The most effective strategy to address learning gaps and avoid repetition is to tackle them during the school year – responding appropriately to continuous and comprehensive assessment and providing early, regular and timely support, strengthening students’ knowledge and metacognitive skills.

- When students have not achieved the minimum to successfully move forward, a more effective approach is automatic promotion, but with support. This entails supporting students, reinforcing teachers’ ability to teach classes with more diverse attainment levels, and extending and intensifying learning opportunities in the specific subjects in which students did not reach a satisfactory level.

The most successful alternatives are focused on prevention to make repetition unnecessary, as done in Finland. They consist of providing the necessary support to those falling behind before the end of the school year and putting them back on track on time, before the learning gaps widen. Evidence shows that students at risk of failing the school year would benefit in particular from additional instruction designed to accelerate the pace of learning. This support should be offered on a regular and frequent basis, supplementing rather than repeating the workload, using different methods and ensuring continuity in student-teacher relationships.

- A careful and continuous assessment of students’ needs would facilitate the design and use of tailored programmes as early as possible, when the learning difficulties emerge, to address them more effectively, reinforce learning and prevent failure. Moreover, sustained student-teacher relationships and fluid information flows between teachers would enable them to recognise and redress students’ weaknesses more effectively. (cf. ibid, 54)

1.3.2. Individual perspective and how to improve low performing disadvantaged schools

Four out of five OECD (2012) recommendations of how to improve low performing disadvantaged schools are also appropriate for considerations in how to structure professional support for underachieving students. Five recommendations are: 1. Strengthen and support school leadership, 2. Stimulate a supportive school climate and environment for learning, 3. Attract, support and retain high quality teachers, 4. Ensure effective classroom learning strategies, 5. Prioritise linking schools with parents and communities.

Foundation Open Society Macedonia can not directly influence state policies which attract, support and retain high quality teachers. However, it can try to make pressure on the state to adopt and implement those policies. The other four recommendations are appropriate for reflection on the areas needed in in-service education for teacher and principals which would prepare schools to provide appropriate support for underachieving students.
→ **Strengthen and support school leadership:** School leadership is the starting point for the transformation of low performing disadvantaged schools. Policies need to focus on preparing and supporting school principals to work in disadvantaged schools by:

- Ensuring that school leadership preparation programmes both strengthen school leaders’ general expertise to improve learning and teaching, and also provide specialised knowledge to handle the challenges of disadvantaged schools.
- Reinforcing coaching and mentoring programmes for school leaders, to support school leaders in the search for solutions, and creating networks of schools to achieve durable change in practices and sustainable improvement.

Providing systemic support for restructuring and re-culturing schools whenever necessary and developing strategies to attract and retain competent leaders in low performing disadvantaged schools are a matter for the government.

→ **Ensure effective classroom learning strategies:** Carefully adapted and implemented pedagogical practices can make a difference for low performing students. To improve learning in their schools classrooms, policies need to ensure that disadvantaged schools combine the following practices:

- Promote the use of a balanced combination of student-centred instruction with aligned curricular and assessment practices. The use of diagnostic tools and formative and summative assessments allow teachers to monitor children’s progress and ensure they are acquiring good understanding and knowledge and make the best progress possible.
- Ensuring that curriculum with high expectations is used in schools: such a curriculum allows promoting a culture of high expectations of success.

*Instruction, assessment and curricula for disadvantaged students*

→ **Stimulate a supportive school climate and environment for learning:** Underachieving students often have behaviour problems or are victims of deteriorated learning climates. Learning, however, requires an orderly and cooperative environment in the school to influence students’ behaviour and engagement in learning. Policies need to ensure that disadvantaged schools are able to create an adequate environment for learning:

- Prioritising the development of positive classroom climates by enhancing positive teacher-student and peer relationships and avoiding an emphasis on discipline alone.
- Promoting the use of data information systems as a school diagnosis tool to identify struggling students and factors of learning disruptions.
- Ensuring that disadvantaged schools provide their students with adequate and timely support such as counselling, mentoring or smoothing transitions through the different levels of education.
- Considering alternative organisation of instruction time over the day, the week or the year. Creating, in particular cases and under certain conditions, smaller classrooms and smaller schools to enable more effective teaching and learning of disadvantaged students. (OECD 2012, 121)

*Promote and use data to identify at risk students – and intervene early*

*Provide disadvantaged schools with a continuum of support for struggling students*

→ **Prioritise linking schools with parents and communities:** Disadvantaged parents tend to be less involved in their children’s schooling, for multiple economic and social reasons. Engaged parents encourage more positive attitudes towards school, improve homework habits, reduce absenteeism, disengagement and dropout and enhance academic achievement. Policies need to be designed to ensure that disadvantaged schools prioritise their links with parents and communities, building the capacity to:

- Improve and diversify communication strategies to align school and parental efforts. The more effective strategies target parents who are more difficult to reach and provide them with clear guidelines on how to best support their children.
- Identify and encourage individuals from the same communities to mentor students from disadvantaged schools and support their learning. This can be particularly
effective in improving schooling outcomes. Links can also be built with local stakeholders, such as the business community.

**→ Attract, support and retain high quality teachers:** Disadvantaged schools are not always staffed with effective teachers. The large effect of teachers on student performance suggests that countries should develop coherent policies to recruit, develop, support and retain quality teachers, especially in low performing disadvantaged schools:

- Align teacher education with disadvantaged schools’ needs, to ensuring that teachers receive the skills and knowledge they need for working in these schools.

- Provide mentoring for novice teachers working in these schools: well structured programmes may improve teacher effectiveness and increase retention in disadvantaged schools.

- Provide supportive working conditions to retain effective teachers in disadvantaged schools. Teachers are more likely to stay in those schools where they can work effectively and see the results of their effort. Without these, teachers may feel ineffective and may move schools or quit teaching altogether.

- Design adequate financial and career incentives to attract and retain high quality teachers in disadvantaged schools.

Provide mentoring to teachers in disadvantaged schools

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**CHAPTER (4)**

**THE FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH WITH THE FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MACEDONIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM**

**4.1. Pre-primary Education**

55% of the teachers in the quantitative research consider that the low inclusion in the pre-school education, very often or often, is the reason for the low achievements of the children.

The results of numerous foreign research projects (e.g., Andersson, 1992; Burchinal, Roberts, Riggins, Zeisel, Neebe and Bryant, 2000; Lamb, 1997; Lazarus, 1991; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan and Carrol, 2004; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000, from Marjanović-Umek et. al 2011) in which researchers have studied the effect of kindergarten on children’s current and later development, learning and success at school, while also taking into account various factors such as the age of the child on entering kindergarten, the type and duration of programmes, the quality of the kindergarten and social environment, show that the inclusion of a child in kindergarten does not in itself have any negative effects on any of the studied areas of the child’s development (e.g., speech, social and emotional development), whereas it has positive effects on certain areas of the child’s development and learning, particularly in relation to the education of the child’s parents and the quality of the work in kindergarten. Researchers have found that precisely for infants and children from a less stimulating family environment it is important to be included as early as possible in a kindergarten that is of high quality and can function as a safety factor for these children in terms of their speech development, preparedness for school and later academic success, for instance.

In the majority of European countries, the proportion of children of all age groups included in kindergarten has grown in the last decade (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1996; 1999; Starting Strong II. Early Childhood Education and Care, 2006).

Kindergarten creates opportunities to reduce unfavourable environmental factors connected with children’s development and learning. To this end, kindergarten introduces systemic and institutional policies and measures (positive discrimination policies) and differential educational approaches in order to mitigate unequal starting
positions and to enable all children optimal development and successful inclusion in the school system irrespective of the education of their parents and their socioeconomic position, and irrespective of their belonging to a national minority, ethnic group or group without permanent or temporary residence in the country.

From international comparisons (more in: Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities (2009); Financiranje vrtcev v državah EU. Primerjalni pregled [Financing kindergartens in EU countries. A comparative overview], 2007, from Marjanović-Umek et. al 2011) it is evident that in different countries responsibility for kindergartens falls to different ministries from the areas of social welfare, health and education, and that in the case of childcare and educational kindergartens the principle of divided responsibility is adhered to. Regardless to which ministry the responsibility for pre-primary education is appointed to, the modern trends show great tendency to educational and upbringing function of kindergartens; so the main purpose of pre-primary education is not anymore just in nursing and caring of children. For assuring high quality pre-primary education high quality pre-primary teachers are needed.

Recommendations

- Ensure that all children whose parents wish so, have an opportunity to attend a pre-primary institution. The state must ensure all parents the possibility of including their children in one of the programmes of preschool education in public kindergartens. Parents have the right to select a programme for their child that is in accordance with their own interests and needs and those of the child. Kindergartens can offer various programmes in terms of programme duration and organisation: a day programme, a half-day programme and a shorter programme. All of these programmes - the day programme, the half-day programme and the shorter programme - are intended for children from one year of age until entry into school.

- Pre-primary Education should be free of charge and mandatory at least in the last year before starting school.

(2) A favourable developmental environment in school

As high as 88% of the teachers in the quantitative research responded that the compensatory classes are prescribed for all students whose performance in certain subjects is lower than their potentials. But over 30% of the teachers answered that compensatory classes should be conducted only by the teachers that have students with low performance in their subject. Additionally, when the teachers are saying that the compensatory classes are for other students as well, and not only for those having unsatisfactory grades (1), it is revealed in the focus groups that “other” usually refers to children who, due to different reasons, have missed a significant part of the classes. Furthermore, the response of more than 30% of the teachers to the question about how often they conduct compensatory classes was “if needed”. The compensatory classes are usually conducted with ten to fifteen students, and, not rarely, with more students. That is, they are usually conducted with all the students who are directed to compensatory classes, from all the classes from the same generation. Generally, the content from the regular classes is repeated in the same manner, frontally, almost without the possibility for individual approach toward the children with learning disabilities. 75% of the participants consider that the overloaded syllabus, containing too many subjects and too many classes, represents a problem in teaching the children with low achievements.

Teaching ought to be organised in a way that facilitates optimum development in all pupils. Children with learning difficulties and special needs ought to receive special care, and the same goes for children that have various talents (general intellectual, creative, learning, artistic, physical and motor).

Recommendations

Due to the differences between individual pupils, the school ought to provide a wide array of activities and teaching approaches (additional work with students for overcoming gaps and lagging behind the teaching material – remedial activities, compensatory classes, involvement of external subjects (e.g. voluntary associations to help pupils with their homework), employment of teacher assistant, an all-day education organization etc.). It is important to emphasize that in compensatory classes teaching methods need to be adapted, however, the criteria for evaluation of knowledge have to remain the same as they are in regular classes and should not be lowered.
Pupils and their parents ought to receive informed counselling, which is planned in advance, so that all parents may make use of what the school has to offer no matter what their own level of education is and thus to contribute to diminishing the differences between pupils caused by their social, cultural and linguistic background.

In order to facilitate optimum development for all pupils, school professionals must cooperate with parents. They must reach a consensus about the basic objectives of teaching and reach an agreement that everyone will work towards realising these objectives. Teachers should provide parents with prompt feedback (parent teacher conferences) on the pupil’s achievement, behaviour, attitude toward school, compliance with the rules, cooperation in class and in the school community, etc. Parents, on the other hand, should promptly inform teachers of the circumstances that could potentially influence their child’s school work. In striving for their pupils’ school success, teachers and schools need the parents’ support. School professionals and parents must mutually respect each other’s privacy, and teachers’ professional decisions that parents have no right to influence should be clearly set apart from the areas of cooperation.

Teaching ought to be organised in a way that facilitates offering immediate support to all pupils in need (i.e. due to learning difficulties, emotional or behavioural problems, speech disorders, illness-related problems, etc). In order to provide the relevant support, teachers and school counsellors must be properly trained. Each school should be equipped with appropriate staff so that it can provide support to children in need. In providing support to children schools can cooperate with other institutions (e.g. counselling centres, health centres, social work centres, etc).

For children with learning difficulties and special needs an individual educational plan needs to be prepared in order to cover the deficit and to guarantee equal learning opportunities to all students. An individual educational plan is a plan for individualising the educational, development and rehabilitation work for the individual child or pupil. It is the fundamental guide for teachers/pre-school teachers and parents in meeting the special needs of the child and adapted to the needs of the individual child.

For performing quality educational work it is important for education staff to have competence in conducting teaching individualisation. The question of individualisation leads professionals to think about how to identify and with proper organisation and didactics treat individual differences between students to prepare quality lessons which will produce quality and sustainable knowledge of students. We define teaching individualisation as: “a didactical principle which mandates schools and teachers to identify, respect and develop reasonable individual differences between students; which tries to substantially individualise and personify otherwise joint teaching and learning, which means, adjusting to individual education and learning specificities, needs, wishes and dispositions of an individual student and enabling their independent work at greatest extension” (Strmčnik, 1987).

We also recommend to consider: (1) the number of pupils in classes with a child with special needs or learning difficulties; (2) the possibility that a school should have the right to make changes in the weekly study load or lessons timetable of a student with special educational needs; (3) autonomy of schools (the state should provide funding for each school to work with children with special needs or learning difficulties, but the extent (number of hours, subjects) and concrete activities should be left to the individual school or team of experts in each school. Each school needs to prepare a plan of working activities with children with special needs or learning difficulties; (4) the number of subjects and the number of planned lessons in a school year for different age groups in public schools (the average number of planned lessons in a school year: for pupils of 7-8 years is 790 hours in OECD countries and 802 hours in EU-19 member states, for pupils of 9-11 years is 835 hours in OECD countries and 847 hours in EU-19 member states, for pupils of 12-14 years is 926 hours in OECD countries and 928 hours in EU-19 member states).

| Table 1: Average number of planned lessons in a school year for different age groups in public schools (Valenčič Zuljan et al. 2011) |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| **Average number of planned lessons in a school year** | **7-8 years** | **9-11 years** | **12-14 years** |
| OECD | 790 | 835 | 926 |
| EU-19 member states | 802 | 847 | 928 |
| SLO | 621 | 721 | 791 |
Sixty percent of the teachers gave affirmative response on the question: whether they have student(s) in the class who belong to vulnerable groups, and have special educational needs, and there are no significant differences as to whether the schools are located in urban or rural areas, the classes are conducted in one or more languages, they are attended by a significant number of Roma students or not. 54.4% of all of the teachers do not consider themselves as competent to work with children that have special educational needs, that is, learning disabilities. 75.4% of all of the teachers responded that they have not attended any training in work with children with special educational needs. More than 75% of the teachers answered that they did not attend training in working with children with special educational needs. In addition, they were asked to assess their needs for additional training in several various areas, required for efficient conducting of compensatory classes. More than 50% of the teachers indicated as highly or very highly needed the following training areas: improvement of students’ motivation (68.4%), work with children with learning disabilities (63.6%), work with children with special needs (62.2%), coping with the problem of attention deficit of children (59.5%), improvement of skills for evaluation of knowledge (58.9%), how to plan individualized classes (58.4%), improvement of cooperation with parents (55.6%).

In contemporary discussions on quality of educational systems (e.g. Hattie, 2009; Abbott, 1988, Barber and Mourshed, 2007, in Developing coherent and system-wide induction programmes for beginning teachers, European Commission Staff Working Document SEC (2010)) professional workers in education are defined as the key factor of the quality of education. Therefore the education policy makers who want to achieve improvement of the educational system should suggest solutions that support quality system of education and constant professional development of all professional workers in education.

There are different definitions of a teacher’s professional development. We explain the teacher’s professional development as a process of significant and lifelong learning in which teachers develop their own comprehensions, and are changing their teaching practice; it is the process which includes teachers’ individual, professional and social dimension, and it is also teachers’ progressing towards the direction of critical, independent, responsible decision-making and acting (Vogrinc and Valenčič Zuljan, 2009; Vogrinc, Krek and Valenčič Zuljan, 2007; Valenčič Zuljan, 2001). Quality lesson management undoubtedly forms the basis for teacher’s professional competence, but, according to Terhart (1997), professional development is a lot more than just »good teaching«. The entire context of teacher’s professional activity is important: social and other types of moral competence, such as diagnostics ability and relations with colleagues, parents, and the principal, contribution to the development of professional culture at school, and the ability for self-observation and self-reflection.

Lifelong learning of professional workers in education is one of the bases of their professional development. To properly accomplish all the work they come across in their professional career they can’t acquire all the knowledge in their pre-service education so they have to constantly develop, train and get new knowledge. There are mostly two roles of professional workers in the knowledge society that are greatly emphasised (Hargreaves, 2003) – professional workers should (1) mostly promote quality knowledge of students, their creative potentials and consequently the progress of society, and (2) at the same time reduce social differences between students to enable development of their potentials by considering individual specificities in educational process.

In the OECD study (Teachers matter, 2005) most countries report that in-service training of educational workers is important. In-service training is compulsory in Austria, Belgium - French part (6 half working days per year), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia (180 hours every 5 years), Finland (3 to 5 days per year), Germany, Greece, Hungary (120 hours every 7 years), Sweden, Italy, Lithuania (5 days per year), Latvia (36 hours every 3 years), Malta (three half working days per year), Romania (95 hours every 5 years) and in Scotland. In - service training is not compulsory in Belgium – Flamish part, Bulgaria, France, Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands. In some countries in - service training is not mandatory for keeping their jobs, but it is important for promotion in professional titles and salary grades (for example in Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Luxembourg and Slovenia).

**Recommendations**

In - service training should be compulsory. All teachers and other professional workers in schools and kindergartens are required to attend at least 5 days (40 hours) of in - service training per year. In - service training should be targeted, according to the needs of individual school and individual plan for professional development of the individual. Longer in - service training programs should be
promoted: at least 3 days (in the duration of a training program teachers should have an opportunity to implement new knowledge into practice).

We must:

- educate teachers to recognize students at risk early enough and to provide intensified support for them;
- educate teachers for differentiation and individualisation (preparing study materials, assessment, teaching plan);
- motivate teachers for working with students, taking into account their individual abilities and interests;
- educate and motivate teachers for implementation of innovative approaches in teaching children with different abilities;
- appropriately reward teachers for their work.

**(4) Counselling services at school**

27.8% of all teachers responded that the persons from the expert service should work with the students in the classroom during the working hours and during classes, in order to achieve better results with the children with learning disabilities. In contrast, 72.2% think that they should work with the students separately in their offices. The idea to work on individual basis with all children in the class and have the colleagues from the expert service help in the process – is unknown.

Counselling services at school counsel students, teachers and parents; they cooperate with pre-primary teachers, teachers and school management at planning, monitoring and evaluating development of a kindergarten or school and accomplishment of educational work and they conduct career consulting. Counselling service cooperates at preparing and realising the individualised programmes for students with special needs. Basic activities of counselling services are: providing help, development and prevention activities and activities of planning and evaluating.

**Recommendations**

For conducting a quality school counselling service it is important that the service is organised at school and that the counsellor is a member of the school staff. Each school need to guarantee the availability of specialists for all children who need special help, like speech therapist, child psychiatrist, psychologist (special educational support)

It is important to emphasise that a fundamental role of the counsellor is providing help and counselling/guidance to teachers with their work with student with learning or any other difficulties (professional support for teachers). Counsellors can not teach students (for example in their office) instead of teachers, they can only provide teachers’ counselling and professional help.

The role of the expert service needs to be seriously reconsidered. Duties of counselling services must be precisely specified and properly defined in the Educational Act.

The administration work of counselling services should be reduced and the norm of counsellors per student should be lowered.

**(5) Support measures at National Level**

45.1% of the participants’ responses in the quantitative research to the question whether all the teachers conduct one compensatory class a week were – no.

Only 30% of the participants in the quantitative research answered that they have received written instructions that refer to the compensatory classes, in terms of how they should be conducted. 89.5% of the participants’ responses to the question: “do you consider that, at the state level, there should be a manual with instructions on how to conduct the compensatory classes?” were – yes. As high as 78.3% of all the teachers agree that the criteria and the requirements for the children with learning disabilities and low achievements should be lowered.

53% of the teachers consider that there should be a possibility for the students to repeat all the grades, 27% - from the fourth to ninth grade, 3.6% - from the seventh to ninth, and only 16% of the teachers responded that they do not agree that the students should repeat the grade.

77.7% of all teachers consider that the numerical evaluation is more relevant for the parents.

19.9% of the teachers consider that the legislative changes from 2009 and 2011 regarding the work with children with low achievements, intro-
duced an improvement, while 62.1% responded that there was no significant change, and 18% responded that the changes had deteriorated the conditions for work with these students. It was established by the analysis that the dissatisfaction with the legislative changes of 2009 and 2011 increases together with the increase of the significance (or importance) of the following factors – variables: The parents of the other children oppose the inclusion of children with special needs in the class (r=.131, p<.01); insufficient involvement of the expert service in direct work with the children with special needs (r=.126, p<.05); Overloaded syllabus (too many subjects and too many classes) which do not allow sufficient time for repetition and integration of the lessons’ content (r=.122, p<.05).

Examination and assessment of students’ achievements are a part of school lessons of a great emphasis: they provide students’, teachers’ and parents’ with information on student’s gained knowledge and individual progression, enable teachers’ further planning of the educational process, to a wider society they give feedback information on quality of an educational system, sometimes the results are used as a selective factor for enrolment to a higher educational level ... In last decades a national testing of knowledge which is centrally organised and provides comparable results (students can compare their knowledge with a national average, teachers and headmasters can compare their school with other schools) has progressively spread through Europe. National testing of knowledge which is equal for the whole population assures with its organisation an objective and comparable information on knowledge of students and indirectly influences the quality of education. International comparison shows that countries that don’t have a national testing of knowledge are rare (Belgium – German speaking part, Czech Republic, Greece, Wales and Liechtenstein). In some countries the national testing is obligatory (Denmark, Norway, Belgium – French speaking part, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Finland, Sweden, England, Island, Cyprus), in others the testing is conducted on sample schools or students (for example Spain, France, Lithuania, Austria). Some countries conduct testing just in two or three subjects, but some of them are planning to add new ones. Others conduct testing on a wider spectrum of subjects. Some of them test subject knowledge annually (like Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Slovak Republic – who test just two major subjects – mathematics and learning language; to these two subjects Germany, Austria, Island and Norway add also foreign language; in Luxembourg they test two of official languages and mathematics; in Italy they added to two basics also science and English), others change or combine compulsory and elective subjects (some of the countries test a wider spectrum of subjects every year or they – at some testing – change subjects; the least is the numbers of countries who test all the subjects – they conduct this testing at the end of the compulsory education).

Also the aim of the national testing is different. In some countries the results are used for identifying individual learning needs and monitoring schools and educational system; in others they are also a decision making factor for further educational paths of students (for example for getting a school certificate, for setting elective subjects, as a proof that a student obtained all the aims of the schooling ...). The later is present in Denmark, Ireland, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Malta, Germany, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Romania, Sweden, Scotland, Norway and Northern Ireland. But in no country we detected that the national testing is a factor for determining teachers’ payment or to check their objectivity.

International comparison shows that in period of compulsory education students are assessed descriptively and numerically – numerical assessment of knowledge is based on grading scales with different number of scale levels. At the beginning of schooling in most researched countries the assessment is descriptive, numerical grades are introduced in different countries at different age. For example in Estonia in first two years they have descriptive assessment and than a five scale numerical assessment. In Germany numerical assessment starts at the end of the second grade, in Poland numerical assessment with a six grading scale starts in the fourth year of schooling. From the eighth grade on the numerical assessment is introduced in Norway (6 scale grading), Denmark (7 scale grading), Finland (7 scale grading). In Portugal (5 scale grading) and Sweden (6 scale grading) numerical assessment starts in the fifth grade.

In most countries students in compulsory education usually progress to a higher class. In Estonia class retention is possible if it is accepted by the teachers’ board. If a student during a school year is assessed badly (insufficient or sufficient) they attend him to remedial classes. If he still doesn’t succeed and fails three or more subjects he can repeat a grade. In the Czech Republic students progress automatically; at every level of compulsory education (two levels – from 1 – 5 grade and from 6 – 9 grade) they can repeat a grade once, if they still don’t pass they progress to a higher grade automatically. In the Netherlands there’s no national policy about grade repetition but the tendency is on a regular progression of students. In first three years of schooling automatic progression of students is present in Poland. Repetition is possible just on

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suggestion of a psychiatrist and parents’ agreement. From the 4th grade on, student progress if they are positively graded at every subject. If they have a negative grade just in one subject they have a remedial test. If they don’t pass they repeat a grade. In Norway, Denmark and Sweden students progress automatically; students with learning difficulties can have additional help. In Italy, too, progression in a higher class is automatic; repetition of a grade is mostly an exception and has to be approved by teachers’ board. Teachers’ board approves progression of students also in France. In Portugal students progress automatically till the fourth grade and later on repetition is possible. In Spain progression is a matter of discussion mostly at the end of a cycle (first cycle students from 6 to 8 years old, second 8-10 and third 10-12); if a student doesn’t accomplish learning objectives, he can repeat a grade but just once on a cycle. In Finland students progress if they are positively assessed in all subjects. Even students with a negative grade can progress if the teachers’ board decides that he will be able to acquire objectives of the next grade.

**Recommendations**

- National technical–scientific group with the aim of drawing up guidelines for schools to develop guidance activities for students with special needs and learning difficulties.
- Adapting information system for collecting and maintaining a database of children who have dropped out of school or who are at risk of dropping out.
- An external evaluation of the students’ knowledge by external assessment.
- Regional educational counselling centres (in counselling centres schools, pre-school child care institutions, and parents can access counselling services from speech therapists, psychologists and social educators).
- Specific training processes, in particular for those who are responsible, at regional and provincial level, for guidance activities.
- Reinforced cooperation between schools and medico-social institutions.

- **Economic support** (e.g. exemption from some fees, free schoolbooks, boarding school, scholarship scheme; students who attend compensatory classes should have a free lunch before the compensatory classes start, after the compensatory classes a free public transport should be organized etc.).

- **Flexible pathways to enter vocational education** (bringing back to school those who are outside the system, “Second Chance” programme, such programmes should be free of charge).

We also recommend to consider: (1) numerical assessment of knowledge in the lower grades of elementary school, (2) the possibility of repeating the lower classes for the student who does not achieve the standards of knowledge, even if he/she is included in all remedial and other supporting activities organised by the school, (3) the role of national examination (number of subject to be checked, how often and the purpose of the national examination).

(6) **Recommendation for the Foundation Open Society Macedonia**

In regard to further work of the Foundation Open Society Macedonia we recommend that it offers help to schools at the level of primary and lower-secondary education (and, if possible, of upper-secondary education), influencing the quality of the work with underachieving students by improving the knowledge and skills of teachers and other professionals. The most effective and lasting measure would be to support the appropriate inclusive educational approaches of teachers and other professionals, principals and schools in working with underachieving students. The Foundation Open Society Macedonia could provide in-service training specifically designed to support inclusion and sustainable quality work with underachieving students.
References


PART THREE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING MEASURES FOR STUDENTS IN MACEDONIA
Pre-primary Education should be free of charge and mandatory at least in the last year before starting school. Ensure that all children whose parents wish so, have an opportunity to attend a pre-primary institution. The state must ensure all parents the possibility of including their children in one of the programmes of preschool education in public kindergartens. Parents have the right to select a programme for their child that is in accordance with their own interests and needs and those of the child. Kindergartens can offer various programmes in terms of programme duration and organisation: a day programme, a half-day programme and a shorter programme.

Due to the differences between individual pupils, the school ought to provide a wide array of activities and teaching approaches (additional work with students for overcoming gaps and lagging behind the teaching material – remedial activities, compensatory classes, involvement of external subjects (e.g. voluntary associations to help pupils with their homework), employment of teacher assistant, an all-day education organization etc.). It is important to emphasize that in compensatory classes teaching methods need to be adapted, however, the criteria for evaluation of knowledge have to remain the same as they are in regular classes and should not be lowered.

Pupils and their parents ought to receive informed counselling, which is planned in advance, so that all parents may make use of what the school has to offer no matter what their own level of education is and thus to contribute to diminishing the differences between pupils caused by their social, cultural and linguistic background.

Teachers should provide parents with prompt feedback (parent teacher conferences) on the pupil’s achievement, behaviour, attitude toward school, compliance with the rules, cooperation in class and in the school community, etc. Parents, on the other hand, should promptly inform teachers of the circumstances that could potentially influence their child’s school work. In striving for their pupils’ school success, teachers and schools need the parents’ support. School professionals and parents must mutually respect each other’s privacy, and teachers’ professional decisions that parents have no right to influence should be clearly set apart from the areas of cooperation.

Teaching ought to be organised in a way that facilitates offering immediate support to all pupils in need (i.e. due to learning difficulties, emotional or behavioural problems, speech disorders, illness-related problems, etc). In order to provide the relevant support, teachers and school counsellors must be properly trained. Each school should be equipped with appropriate staff so that it can provide support to children in need. In providing support to children schools can cooperate with other institutions (e.g. counselling centres, health centres, social work centres, etc).

For children with learning difficulties and special needs an individual educational plan needs to be prepared in order to cover the deficit and to guarantee equal learning opportunities to all students. An individual educational plan is a plan for individualising the educational, development and rehabilitation work for the individual child or pupil. It is the fundamental guide for teachers/pre-school teachers and parents in meeting the special needs of the child and adapted to the needs of the individual child.

For performing quality educational work it is important for education staff to have competence in conducting teaching individualisation. The question of individualisation leads professionals to think about how to identify and with proper organisation and didactics treat individual differences between students to prepare quality lessons which will produce quality and sustainable knowledge of students.

Adapting information system for collecting and maintaining a database of children who have dropped out of school or who are at risk of dropping out.
Economic support (e.g. exemption from some fees, free schoolbooks, boarding school, scholarship scheme; students who attend compensatory classes should have a free lunch before the compensatory classes start, after the compensatory classes a free public transport should be organized etc.).

Flexible pathways to enter vocational education (bringing back to school those who are outside the system, “Second Chance” programme, such programmes should be free of charge).

We also recommend to consider: (1) the number of pupils in classes with a child with special needs or learning difficulties; (2) the possibility that a school should have the right to make changes in the weekly study load or lessons timetable of a student with special educational needs; (3) autonomy of schools (the state should provide funding for each school to work with children with special needs or learning difficulties, but the extent (number of hours, subjects) and concrete activities should be left to the individual school or team of experts in each school. Each school needs to prepare a plan of working activities with children with special needs or learning difficulties, but the volume (number of lessons, subjects etc.) and concrete activities should be thoroughly planned in each school by team of experts. Each school should prepare plan for activities with students with special needs and/or difficulties in learning.

We recommend that conditions for “fair policy” be created at a school level. School should have autonomy in the preparation of an elaborated program based on which all the teachers would be engaged equally and fairly. If the compensatory classes are mostly delivered by teachers in particular subjects, based on such “fair policy”, the other teachers, in their subjects, should have a constructive program for work with the students (for example) in clubs. In such a way, on the one hand, the problem with the uneven and unfair engagement of teachers will be overcome and the danger of eroding their motivation will be overcome. But, on the other hand, it is equally important that more constructive atmosphere and conditions are provided for the students with low learning achievements to catch up the missed contents which are essential for upgrading their future education. At the same time, the other teachers will be engaged in their own areas in upgrading the knowledge and the skills of the students that have higher achievements. It should not be mandatory for the school to ensure that there is one compensatory class a week, but it should be mandatory to ensure conditions for overcoming such gaps in the knowledge, no matter how many classes per week in the particular subject are required. Such a system, instead of formal measures, would be based on indicators of positive changes in the quality of education of particular students.