



ARMENIA – State of Inclusion

The Armenian history of inclusive education started in 2001 when NGO Bridge of Hope together with mainstream school # 27 in Yerevan in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) of Armenia initiated the 1st piloting phase of inclusive education.

Based on best practices and lessons learnt from the pilot stage of inclusive education, the Government of Armenia developed a new law about “Education of People Needing Special Conditions in Education”. The law was adopted by the parliament of Armenia in June, 2005. Thus the law stated inclusive education as state policy in the country. Following the law in 2005 the Government of Armenia adopted regulation of financing inclusive schools. In 2006 the five mainstream schools (piloting inclusive education from 2001-2005) were officially recognized as inclusive schools and started to get additional funds from the government for special educators and support staff. Already in 2010 the number of inclusive schools in Armenia reached to 65.

In 2009 the Government of Armenia approved the decree on the “Pilot of Total inclusive education Program and New Financing Procedures” on one Marz level (Marz is an administrative unit of several regions in Armenia). A new financial procedure was approved to support the total inclusion of children with disabilities and special educational needs in mainstream education system. 77 mainstream schools of Tavush Marz (in the North-East of Armenia) were given additional funds for special educators and teacher assistants. Based on this experimental phase of total inclusion new challenges became apparent: An inclusive system of education will be possible when education laws, policies, standards and curricula are inclusive.

In August 2011 the Government of Armenia approved the inclusive National Mainstream Education Standards and Curricula of Mainstream Education (through merging special and mainstream education standards and curricula). The government is now fully committed to reform the mainstream and special education sectors and ensure that all children with special needs are enrolled in schools or other educational institutions (both special and mainstream) as required by Armenian law, and their education is based on and organized according to new, internationally acceptable standards.

The goals of education, adopted by the Armenian government, focus on access and quality of education, restructuring public education to enable it to respond to the basic learning needs of all students. These goals apply also to special education, raising new challenges and implications for special schools and their relationship to general education. To meet the overall goal for education the Government of Armenia has endorsed the “Education Development Program for 2011-2015” in 2011. Sustainable development of Inclusive Education is one of the strategic directions of the program. The 2nd objective of the strategy recognizes the expansion of inclusive education in mainstream education system as the means of proper access to education for children with disabilities and other special educational needs. The decrease of special schools is another strategy



of this policy to be realized through transformation of special schools into resource centers to provide support for inclusive schools. And lastly the policy paper states that by 2015 Armenia has got a proper inclusive legal framework to make transition to total inclusive education system.

Following this program Bridge of Hope and the Danish organization Mission East supported MOES to develop the package of amendments to the Armenian law about Mainstream Education (the law About Education of People Needing Special Conditions in Education will be cancelled and its main statements on inclusive education are included in suggested amendments to mainstream education law). The draft of the law has already passed the 1st reading in the national Assembly of Armenia. This is a new stage of developing the inclusive education policy in Armenia. An important amendment suggested is the article that states that Armenia declares inclusive education as the way to ensure equal access and participation to mainstream education for every child. Three levels of psycho-pedagogical resource services are presented in the package – school, regional and republican levels. It states that selected special schools will be transformed into psycho-pedagogical services to provide resource services and to support inclusive schools as well as preserving their right to provide education services to children with severe learning disability/impairment.

Thus the “Education Development Program for 2011-2015” and the following changes in mainstream education law may provide a strong platform for potential engagement of mainstream and special education teachers in inclusive mainstream settings in Armenia as well as promote the right momentum for gradual conversion of special schools into psycho-pedagogical resource services for inclusive schools at regional/community level.

Though the above mentioned policies, regulations and laws are factors that promote and facilitate the expansion of inclusive education in Armenia the overall approach to the assessment of needs of children with disabilities keeps to be based on a medical model. The dominance of the medical model of disability is a serious obstacle for creation of proper inclusive systems and formative assessment of children based on the principles of WHO ICF. The special educational needs of children are still assessed in accordance to Special Needs Assessment Standards (approved by the minister of Education in 2003) of Armenia that are based on medical model categorization of disorders in children.

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