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Center for Educational Researches and Consulting

An Assessment of Implementation of Inclusive Education in the Republic of Armenia

Center for Educational Researches and Consulting

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Acknowledgements

This assessment was conducted by the Center for Educational Researches and Consulting in 34 inclusive schools (IS) that operate in five target *marzes* (regions) of the Republic of Armenia (RA). The value of this research, which took place during the period of January to June 2013, is in the use of participatory assessment methodology, which includes a presentation of the current situation, identification of problems and loopholes by direct beneficiaries of inclusive education program as juxtaposed with legal positions of state authorities and public/international structures with the aim to detect inaccuracies and fill in the gaps in sectorial policies and legal decisions for the benefit of inclusive education system development in RA and subsequent preparation to overall inclusiveness.

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Abbreviations

CPU	Child Protection Unit
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GTC	Guardianship and Trustee Committee
IC	Individualized Curricula
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IE	Inclusive Education
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IS	Inclusive School
KII	Key Informant Interview
MPPAC	Medical, Psychological and Pedagogical Assessment Center
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
NIE	National Institute of Education
RA	Republic of Armenia
RMAC	Republican Multidisciplinary Assessment Center
SAI	Self-Administered Interview
SEN	Special Education Needs
SENA	Special Education Needs Assessment
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview

Executive summary

Introduction. An important part of educational reforms since 2000, inclusive education (IE) has become one of the key priorities of the Armenian government. Following the 2005 adoption of the RA Law on the Education of Persons with Special Education Needs, IE was embedded in the National Program for Education Development. Seven years after the adoption of the law, the National Assembly has approved an amendment to the Law on General Education, which entails integrating IE into mainstream schools and preparing the system to transition to overall inclusiveness, which is planned to be fully realized by 2022. Such developments require an up-to-date comprehensive study of IE implementation in RA – one that identifies field achievements and main problems, and evaluates the overall level of preparedness of the education system for the transition to overall inclusion.

Goals and objectives. This research report aims to evaluate the current state of IE in the Republic of Armenia; identify its main strengths, weaknesses and challenges; and prepare grounds for further reform-oriented decision-making. The study has been financially supported by Open Society Foundations – Armenia and conducted by the Center for Educational Research and Consulting. Overall, 34 inclusive schools (IS) were sampled in five target *marzes* (regions), during the period of January to June 2013. Over the course of the research, 64 IS representatives (principals and members of a multidisciplinary team) and 34 parents of children with special education needs (SEN) were surveyed, and the attitudes of nearly 1200 teachers and students were examined. For a better situational overview, the research has also included 12 field expert opinions. The assessment was administered using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods; in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were selected as primary information gathering methods, along with the field-related desk research of legal documentation and international protocols.

The primary objective of the recommendations in this report is to inform legislation and practice as the Armenian education system transitions towards the goal of overall inclusion.

Summary of findings

IE system in RA: The Law on the Education of Persons with Special Education Needs and the Inclusive Education Program were adopted in 2005¹. The law defines IE as joint education of persons with SEN and without SEN through the provision of special conditions in mainstream schools and vocational training institutions. Such a definition implies that the law focuses more on the organization of integrated education and special learning conditions for persons with SEN than on the provision of equal educational opportunities for all students. In other words, schools administer integration through the organization of joint learning processes, rather than providing equal opportunities for all students.

Armenia's inclusive education system consists of the following elements: 1) evaluation of child's special educational needs, conducted by the Medical, Psychological and Pedagogical Assessment Center (MPPAC); 2) individualized curricula developed by school specialists and MPPAC a month after the child's admission to IS; 3) physical and technical equipment of inclusive schools, defined as necessary areas and facilities, methodological resources and sanitation; 4) multidisciplinary teams consisting of three or more professionals; 5) teachers who instruct within the guidelines of the mainstream education program; and 6) endoresment by law for parents of children with SEN to participate in the development of individualized curricula.

After the adoption of the Law on the Education of Persons with SEN, 98 ISs have been established in RA, with unequal distribution among the regions: more than 50% of ISs are located in the capital, whereas the regions of Ararat, Vayots Dzor and Syunik have only one IS each.

¹ RA Law on the Education of Persons with Special Education Needs, <http://edu.am/index.php?id=97&topMenu=-1&menu1=85&menu2=89&arch=0#g3>

Pilot project in Tavush region: In 2010, five years after Law on the Education of Persons with SEN was passed, Bridge of Hope NGO and the RA Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) jointly introduced a pilot project, which was implemented in Tavush region. The goal of the project is to create conditions in all mainstream schools of Tavush for educating children with SEN. It is assumed that some children are in constant need of special support, which has to be provided by teacher's assistants. The number of teacher's assistant is equal to 10% of the average annual number of non-SEN students. 62 out of 77 schools in Tavush do not have students classified by MPPAC as children with SEN. These schools employ teacher's assistants, but do not have special education support staff. Therefore, they are not certified as IS. Only 15 schools from Tavush are included in the list of ISs and host children classified by MPPAC as children with SEN. These schools employ both teacher's assistants and special educators. Special educators receive state funding through the experimental model, with no additional financing.

Financing the inclusive education system: Currently, there are two systems of funding for IE in Armenia: the typical model and the experimental model of Tavush. In the case of typical funding, a month before the beginning of the academic year, the MoES provides the Ministry of Finance with the number of children with SEN who are enrolled in officially recognized ISs. The total number is then distributed into groups of 15 children with SEN. Each group is managed by a fulltime special educator, another educator, psychologists, and a cook. The funding covers food and transportation costs for children with SEN, plus water and electricity². Other expenditures are determined through the standard procedure used for financing mainstream schools. The Ministry of Finance calculates the annual budget and channels amounts to the regional departments for redistribution. While an annual sum of 100,000 AMD is allocated for each child without SEN, those defined as children with SEN receive four to five times more funding, amounting to 400,000 to 500,000 AMD per year. In Tavush region, designated IE funding is allocated using an experimental model, with no additional funding criteria³. Schools that do not have students with SEN are funded only to cover the salaries of teacher's assistants, which is equal to 80% of a mainstream teacher's average salary. Officially accredited ISs in Tavush also receive funding to cover special teachers' wages, equivalent to a mainstream teacher's average monthly salary.

Towards overall inclusion: In 2012, the MoES came up with an initiative to shift from inclusive and non-inclusive schools towards inclusion for all, where all mainstream schools would naturally gravitate towards inclusion. This is a risky initiative that requires accurately calculated state budgeting and investments in ISs in order to guarantee their growth dynamics. According to the Minister of Education and Science, by 2022, all mainstream schools should open their doors to children with SEN. However, neither project experts nor representatives from MoES/Ministry of Finance can forecast the dynamics of IS growth by 2022. Moreover, none of the mentioned parties can determine the capacity of the state budget to foster about 1400 ISs in Armenia. But most importantly, no principal financing mechanisms are foreseen to guarantee inclusion for all. Will the current typical model of mainstream school funding extend to all schools? Will the Tavush pilot project funding model shift to the typical model, or should new financing mechanisms be devised? These questions remain unanswered by authorities and by field representatives. Some experts prefer the minimum cost funding model of the Tavush project, without considering whether this model provides a quality education.

Analysis of IS physical accessibility, technical equipment and methodological resources: The Law on the Education of Persons with SEN vaguely defines the physical accessibility criteria for IS. It refers to necessary areas and infrastructures without specifying what they are. For the purposes of this study, the accessibility of IS was evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. *Presence of ramps inside and outside the buildings*

² <http://www.edu.am/index.php?id=361&topMenu=-1&menu1=85&menu2=109>

³ <http://www.edu.am/DownloadFile/4165arm-havelvac.pdf>

None of the surveyed schools met the criteria of accessibility inside the buildings. Only entrance ramps are installed. As a rule, students are forced to carry their classmates with SEN to the second floor. This is very dangerous, particularly for children with physical/locomotor impairment, and can cause serious damage to their health.

2. Adapted of sanitation facilities

Only one of the surveyed schools, Yerevan school N125, has sanitation facilities partially adapted to the needs of children with SEN. Other schools are equipped with typical bathrooms, which are in very poor conditions in the regions.

3. Designated cafeteria

34 schools have designated cafeterias.

4. Accessible gymnasium

None of the surveyed schools is equipped with an accessible gymnasium, nor do they have specialized instructors to train physically impaired children.

5. Accessible classrooms

There are no specially adapted classrooms in the schools. It is financially burdensome for schools to adapt the classrooms to meet special needs, so classes are held in mainstream classrooms.

Out of the five specified criteria, the majority of schools meet only the first criterion partially and the third one completely. The remaining criteria are almost entirely not met. Therefore in terms of physical conditions, the 34 surveyed inclusive schools can be classified as underequipped.

In comparison to accessibility and physical conditions, the level of methodological equipment in the schools is considered satisfactory. These schools are supported by MPPAC, which provides them with methodological manuals, and international and local non-governmental organisations that facilitate the procurement of modern didactic materials. All observed schools have special resource rooms/centers, some of which are renovated and sufficiently equipped (such as those in Tavush region), while others require additional maintenance.

Professional resources of ISs: There is no common approach to the composition of a mandatory multidisciplinary team and its functions. The MoES stipulates that the team should be comprised of a team coordinator and various professionals (mainstream teachers, special education teachers, speech therapists, psychologists). However it does not provide any job descriptions, nor does it define professional roles and responsibilities. Due to lack of clear regulations, the composition of a multidisciplinary team and perceptions of professional functions differ among regions and schools. The same problem applies to Tavush, which does not employ multidisciplinary teams. On the other hand, there is no established model for teacher's assistants and special educators. In fact, some schools employ special educators, psychologists and other teaching staff that have been reclassified as teacher's assistants against their will. Some of them, particularly those who have worked as social workers or psychologists, do the same job with lower pay. In other cases, teacher's assistants carry out the same duties as social workers or psychologists, but they lack the required professional qualification. Moreover, in four out of the six studied ISs in Tavush, parents of children with SEN complained that due to the lack of specialists, their children did not receive sufficient individual learning support from the teaching staff. The next problem stems from weak collaboration between parents and the multidisciplinary team. Often, in trying to hide the fact that their child has SEN from the community, parents significantly reduce the viability and effectiveness of school efforts. Another issue is that some subject teachers are prejudiced and have stereotypical attitudes towards children with SEN. It should be noted that this problem has two sides: nearly 70% of students claim that teachers treat children with SEN equal to the others; meanwhile interviews with multidisciplinary team members reveal that sometimes, teachers perceive children with SEN as incapable, unhealthy, and not worth spending time on. As a result, the entire load of responsibility falls on the multidisciplinary teams. Also, mainstream teachers have no desire to spend extra time on children with SEN because they lack the training, knowledge and skills in inclusive education. Even if they have undergone training, many of these teachers believe that considering their meager pay, they should not have to handle the educational problems of children with SEN, especially when there are specialized groups of professionals who are paid to do it.

Teacher training and feedback mechanisms: As prescribed by the law, before being granted the status of IS, a school must have its multidisciplinary team and teaching staff trained. 62.8% of the teachers who participated in the study confirmed that they had undergone training on inclusive education, and 61.8% were only trained once. 50.1% of the trained teachers did not remember the name of the organization that conducted the training, and 43.2% couldn't even remember the topic of the training. Although 40% stated that they needed additional training, 35.8% of them had no idea which specific topic they needed training in. Hence, either training organizations do not provide feedback mechanisms to assess training outcomes and knowledge application, or teachers are not really interested in the training and its outcomes. 32 out of the 34 trained multidisciplinary team members involved in this study identified a number of problems in the process. Specifically, they highlighted the need to increase the practical knowledge component of the training organized by the National Institute of Education (NIE). In hindsight, respondents assessed NIA trainings as satisfactory. The problem lies in the fact that when inclusive schools were first introduced, not many people knew about IE. However the actual implementation of IE has raised a lot of questions, the answers to which the teachers still have not received. Trainings need to be targeted on designing learning profiles, which would help participants increase their professional knowledge and practice. Developing feedback mechanisms is another prerequisite. The overwhelming majority of multidisciplinary team members are convinced that public training institutions lack institutional feedback mechanisms. Of the 34 members of multidisciplinary teams, not one was aware of the Q&A (<http://www.aniedu.am/faq.html>) and electronic inquiry (<http://www.aniedu.am/polls.html/>) sections of the NIA website. Many teachers do not know where to find up-to-date literature on IE, since the materials on the NIA website are very limited. Narrow profile specialists are trained only once. Such infrequent training affects the effectiveness of knowledge construction, application and development. The lack of an organized pre-training needs assessment is another shortcoming that results in a one-size-fits-all approach. An assessment of learning needs is one of the most effective methods for increasing the applicability of knowledge, and forming consistent attitudes among trainees towards the training process.

Special educational needs assessment and individualized curricula (IC): The assessment of special education needs in the Republic of Armenia is carried out by MPPAC. According to our research findings, in the regions, the level of awareness among parents about the process and objectives of special education needs assessments is very low. Neither teaching staff nor MPPAC specialists have adequately explained to parents the nature of a special education needs assessment.

There are only three MPPACs in Armenia – one in Yerevan and two branches in the regions of Syunik and Lori. Due to the limited number of centers, the process of special needs assessments is generally short (one to two days). For increased effectiveness, it is necessary to provide a sufficient number of MPPACs staffed with the required number of professionals. As many parents confirm, it is also vital that the child's educational needs are reassessed more frequently – once a year, for instance, rather than every two years, as is the current practice. It should also be mentioned that some parents are wary of the assessment methods used by MPPACs, considering them too primitive. Specialists at the centers also admit that their methods need significant improvement. According to the director of MPPAC, the team collaborates with UNICEF and a number of international experts to improve their SEN assessment tools. They also use international best practice and knowledge acquired through trainings in order to develop functional tools, particularly for assessing visual and mobile impairments.

There are three key issues related to the planning of individualized curricula (IC). First, the majority of parents are not familiar with the concept and purpose of IC. Parents do not participate in the development of IC as they do not understand that the actual organization of their child's education depends on the special needs defined in the IC. Another obstacle to IC planning is weak collaboration between multidisciplinary teams and subject teachers. Quite often, subject teachers do not adequately complete their corresponding subject sections in the IC. They argue that children with SEN should be managed by multidisciplinary team members. The third problem arises during IC reviews, where the child's performance is evaluated by progress made, or lack thereof.

If no progress has been observed, the final goal changes or remains the same, but a thorough analysis is not conducted of the factors that may underlie the lack of progress, which would justify changes to methods and approaches.

IE perceptions among stakeholders: Some beneficiaries of the IE system, particularly the parents of children both with and without SEN, are still poorly informed about the nature and purpose of IE. Low awareness among the parents of children without SEN leads to misinformation which shapes the negative (and sometimes even aggressive) attitudes toward the IE system. Such a perception is common among the vast majority of parents in regional ISs. They stigmatize children with SEN as “unhealthy” and “a threat to society”, and push to isolate these children in separate classes or educate them only in special schools.

The majority of parents of children with SEN also misunderstand the goals of IE. Some parents identify IE as means of providing their child an opportunity to get out of the house and socialize with other children; others see it as a daycare service. These parents are not aware of their children's rights, nor do they have practical knowledge of the mechanisms to protect those rights. Hence, when their children's rights are violated (they are mocked, insulted, not allowed to participate in group events), parents interfere only to ask the principal or the teacher to keep their child away from other children in the classroom. As a result, in the presence of all students, mainstream teachers stress the “special condition” of the children with SEN.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Instead of inclusive education, there is a functioning model of integrated education in Armenia. Children with SEN are integrated into schools and get the same education as everybody else, but are differentiated by individualized curricula and dubbed with the derogatory label of the “inclusive kids”. Hence the concept of the quality of education is not present in any form in the IE system of Armenia.

Conclusion 2: The implementation of IE in Armenia lacks a comprehensive approach towards the professional team. This has a negative impact on the quality of IE.

Conclusion 3: The members of multidisciplinary teams do not have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Subject teachers are indifferent to IE and do not devote enough time to educating children with SEN.

Conclusion 4: Due to the lack of multidisciplinary teams in the pilot project in Tavush region, children with SEN are not receiving the quality or quantity of customized education that they need.

Conclusion 5: The collaboration between multidisciplinary teams, subject teachers and parents of children with SEN is very weak. Subject teachers do not trust multidisciplinary team members, and parents do not participate in IC design.

Conclusion 6: There are biased and stereotypical social attitudes towards children with SEN, which are often reinforced by the parents of children with SEN.

Conclusion 7: Regarding overall inclusiveness, the general growth dynamics of IS and their funding channels remain uncertain. These conditions are not favorable for the IE system, leaving it unprepared for the shift to universal inclusion.

General suggestions

Suggestion 1: The current model of inclusive education should be revised to ensure provision of quality education for all students, rather than just joint educating of children with and without SEN.

Suggestion 2: For a realistic assessment of inclusion for all, it is essential to determine the growth dynamics of IS and budgetary allocations by 2015. Increasing funding in the regions could support more balanced growth.

Suggestion 3: If a decision is made to shift from the experimental funding model of Tavush to typical funding, an in-depth case study must first be conducted of the Tavush project, in order to assess the quality-investment ratio.

Suggestion 4: Every initiative or pilot program related to inclusive education should be developed in a transparent manner. The results should be presented and discussed with representatives from state, non-governmental and international organizations.

Specific suggestions

MoES

Suggestion 5: Clear definitions should be provided for the physical and technical criteria of inclusive schools.

Suggestion 6: State regulations on the structure and functions of multidisciplinary teams should be elaborated. The team should at minimum include a special educator, a social worker, a psychologist and a speech therapist. The structure and functions of the multidisciplinary team must be embedded in its Charter and be applicable to **all** inclusive schools.

MPPAC

Suggestion 7: It is necessary to decide on the most optimal and child-centered timeframe for special education needs assessments.

Suggestion 8: Continuous professional support to multidisciplinary teams and subject teachers should be embedded in the Charter of the MPPAC.

NIE

Suggestion 9: The number of trainings on inclusive education and related topics should be increased and special attention should be paid to practical knowledge and skills.

Suggestion 10: In the framework of inclusive education trainings, needs assessments and mandatory follow-up mechanisms should be further developed.

Suggestion 11: Materials and handbooks related to inclusive education should be made more accessible to teachers and specialists.

Local and international NGOs

Suggestion 12: Special emphasis should be placed on developing activities aimed at establishing tolerance among parents of children with and without SEN and teachers.

Suggestion 13: The administration of inclusive schools should ensure mandatory participation of parents of children with SEN in the development, monitoring and evaluation of their child's individualized curricula.

Introduction

Education in Armenia has traditionally been highly rated. Today, the maintenance and development of the education system, and its compatibility with international standards, are considered to be among the most important national issues.

In the early 2000s, inclusive education (IE) was declared a priority by the Armenian government.⁴ The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the 1994 Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education, and was restated at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. As a result, the challenge of developing an inclusive approach to education has been put on the political agenda in many countries, including Armenia. The goal of “education for all” can be achieved if inclusion is the fundamental philosophy of programs and if the main approach to programs in education is based on human rights.

In 2005, the Armenian government adopted the concept of inclusive education. In June 2005, the Law on the Education of Persons with Special Education Needs was passed and Inclusive Education is included in the draft Education Development National Program for 2008-2015. However, the transition from the dual system inherited from Soviet times towards inclusive education is not fully implemented. Children with disabilities are most often educated in segregated environments, such as special schools.

Significant progress has been made in the last nine years, since efforts in this direction were first implemented. However, close monitoring of the initiatives has highlighted weaknesses in the current educational provisions. Official statistics demonstrate a significant decline in the number of children enrolled in special schools – from 9% in the 2008-2009 academic year to 2.6% in the 2009-2010 academic year. The total enrolment of school-age children in mainstream education has increased to 90.3%.⁵ However in reality, there has not been a reasonable decline in the number of children enrolled in special schools. Research conducted by UNICEF in 2011 shows that 70% of children with disabilities residing in orphanages do not go to any school at all and only 19% of parents of children with special education needs mentioned insufficient conditions and low quality of education as main reasons why their children are excluded from mainstream schools.

The new amendments to the Law on Mainstream Education set a target of overall inclusion by 2020. However, in order for this target to be reached, schools must be able and prepared to take this up, with proper conditions, staff capacities and attitudes.

From this point of view, the existing IE programs are highly relevant. However, because special schools continue to be maintained and endorsed by a large portion of the governing bodies, and because IE has been introduced as an alternative to special and mainstream educations, the relevance of these programs is often

⁴ As described by UNESCO, “inclusion is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through inclusive practices in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion with and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.”

⁵ Social Situation in Armenia, Yearbook, the National Statistical Service of Armenia for 2009 and 2010; “Inclusive Education - Quality Education for ALL Children” project final report, 2011, World Vision

compromised. Even in cases where inclusive schools are available, they are not accessible to all students, either because of lack of adequate infrastructure, lack of resources, or lack of quality services.

Some research has been conducted on the IE system in Armenia, by both local and international organizations, but certain core questions are left out of these reports. Areas that have not yet been fully explored include the current state of IE legislation; the accumulated projection of targets; the physical/technical/human capacity of schools to reach targets; and perceptions and attitudes held by school communities (administration, teachers, students and parents) towards inclusive education. There is a lack of analytical and statistical data on the number of teachers’ trainings, availability of inclusive school equipment, budget allocations, as well as parents’ awareness on child rights and education quality standards. This research project will provide a holistic analysis of the inclusive education system in Armenia.

Project goals and objectives

This research report aims to evaluate the current state of inclusive education in the Republic of Armenia; identify its main strengths, weaknesses and challenges; and provide recommendations for further improvements in the field of IE, with the long-term goal of overall inclusion in mind. Based on the research objectives outlined in the ToR, the evaluation team developed the following specific objectives and data collecting methods:

1. Inclusive education (IE) system in RA: legislation, dynamics, perspectives

<i>Evaluation objectives</i>	<i>Data collecting methods</i>
1.1. How, when and by whom were the criteria and procedures of granting the status of “inclusive” to mainstream schools designed? How realistic and feasible are those standards? To what extent was the design process participatory? To what extent was international experience reflected in those criteria and procedures? To what extent is the IE strategy relevant and aligned with the priorities of target areas? To what extent are criteria and procedures of granting the status of “inclusive” explicit for different groups of stakeholders (principals, teachers, parents, etc.)? Were any unplanned outputs achieved? What major changes have been implemented as a result of adapting IE?	The key evaluation questions under objective 1.1 will be surveyed through document review (IE legislation, program documentations, state and non-governmental/international organizations' assessments/evaluation/monitoring reports); key informant interviews (KII) designed with the participation of experts from state and non-governmental organizations, development and amendments in the IE system ⁶ . In addition, in-depth interviews (IDI) with school principals and parents of children with special education needs (enrolled in inclusive classes), semi-structured interviews (SSI) with teachers, and focus group discussions (FGD) with parental community will be conducted to find out the level of explicitness of IE system standards for target groups, as well as to bring out major changes implemented as a result of IE adaption.

⁶ (GOs (MoES, National institute of Education, Republican Multi-disciplinary Assessment Centre), NGOs (Bridge of hope, Mission East, etc.), international organizations (UNICEF, World Vision, etc.): the final list will be defined based through preparatory stage and field work phase using snowball technique of data collecting.

<p>1.2. What is the dynamic of granting schools the status of “inclusive” and what are the criteria (e.g. increasing number of children with special education needs in communities, schools’ willingness, parents’ demands, etc.) of increasing the number of inclusive schools per year? What main achievements were identified in operating inclusive schools? What are challenges and risks inclusive schools are faced with? How and by whom they are/should they be addressed? What capacity do different groups of stakeholders have to address those challenges/risks? How many school-aged children with disabilities attend mainstream schools (per region)?</p>	<p>Key evaluation questions under objective 1.2 will be surveyed through document review (state and non-governmental reports on the number of schools enrolled in the IE system from the launch of the program, proportion of children with special education needs enrolled/excluded from mainstream school, and enrolment/exclusion dynamics); KIIs with experts of state and non-governmental organizations responsible and participated in design, development and amendments in the IE system. Special attention will be paid to IDIs with school headmasters and parents of children with special education needs (enrolled in inclusive classes), semi-structured interviews with teachers and focus group discussions with parental community to identify challenges and risks inclusive schools are facing with and the capacities of addressing them.</p>
<p>1.3. What is the projection of increase in number of inclusive schools? How and by whom the planned targets of increase are defined? Was the process of defining planned increase participatory? Are the existing human/physical/financial/time capacities of schools sufficient for providing overall inclusiveness? How and by whom the extent of sufficiency was measured? What resources are needed to accommodate the projected increase (trainings, curriculum adaption, infrastructure changes)? Who and when will assist in providing those resources?</p>	<p>Key evaluation questions under objective 1.3 will be surveyed basically through KIIs designed with the participation of experts from state and non-governmental organizations, development and amendments in the IE system; document review (IE legislation providing overall inclusiveness, program documentation, state and non-governmental/internal and external evaluation reports). IDIs with school headmasters and semi-structured interviews with teachers will be carried out to identify the resources needed to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the IE system and accommodate the projected increase.</p>
<p>1.4. What are the criteria for budget allocation to inclusive schools and how were those criteria defined? Are those allocations enough to ensure quality education for children with special education needs? How are the budget allocations spent? Are there mismatches between registered number of children in inclusive classes and the real number of children with special education needs enrolled in schools? What accountability mechanisms exist ensuring the budget allocations are spent on the needs of disabled children? What will be the dynamic of budget allocations for schools in case overall inclusion is adapted and practiced.</p>	<p>Key evaluation questions under objective 1.4 will be surveyed through KIIs designed with the participation of experts from state and non-governmental organizations, development and amendments in the IE system; document review (IE documentation regulating financial allocations for inclusive schools, state and non-governmental/internal and external evaluation reports, schools financial reports, invoices, any other documentation identifying how budget allocations are spent by inclusive schools’ administration). IDIs with school principals and semi-structured interviews with teachers, as well as IDIs with parents</p>

	of children with special education needs will be conducted to determine how budget allocations are spent and whether they meet the needs of all students in inclusive classes.
1.5. What kinds of projects are either currently underway or planned that target inclusive education? Who is implementing these projects? What are the main targets/objectives of these projects? How realistic and feasible are they? Are these projects aligned with the State IE Program? How do these projects supplement/contradict /challenge/overlap with the overall state concept on IE?	Key evaluation questions under objective 1.5 will be surveyed through KIIs designed with the participation of experts from state and non-governmental organizations, and development and amendments in the IE system. Additional information will be gathered on the school level about implemented projects that target inclusive education, their effectiveness and impact.

2. Inclusive schools: current situation, perceptions, challenges, expectations

2.1. What are the <i>physical</i> capacities of inclusive schools (number of ramps, specially equipped classrooms, toilets, etc.)? Do these capacities meet the requirements outlined in documents regulating the field? Do the capacities meet the needs of children with special education needs? How accountable are inclusive schools and communities in ensuring sufficient physical capacities? What do state and non-governmental organizations do to develop the capacities? What is the quality of the support currently provided?	Key evaluation questions under objective 2.1 will be surveyed through observation of target areas in sample inclusive schools. Information will primarily be collected through IDIs with school principals and especially with parents of children with special education needs enrolled in inclusive classes; and through semi-structured interviews with teachers. KIIs designed with the participation of experts from state and non-governmental organizations, and development and amendments in the IE system will also be conducted.
2.2. What are the <i>technical</i> capacities of inclusive schools (developmental toys, special education materials, etc.)? Do these capacities meet the requirements outlined in documents regulating the field? Do the capacities meet the needs of children with special education needs? How accountable are inclusive schools and communities in ensuring technical physical capacities? What state and non-governmental organizations develop the capacities? What is the quality of the support currently?	Please see above.
2.3. What are the <i>human</i> capacities of inclusive schools? Do they have resident psychologists and social workers? Do their education and professional experience meet the requirements outlined in documents regulating the field, as well as the needs of children with special education needs? What kind of trainings has been provided to inclusive school teachers? Who developed	Information will primarily be collected through IDIs with school principals and especially through SSIs with teachers who participated in trainings. KIIs designed with the participation of experts from state and non-governmental organizations for inclusive schools will be conducted.

<p>training modules and who has been trained? How were training modules developed? To what extent are these modules aligned with teachers' needs and expectations? To what extent do training modules cover all necessary information to teach children with different types of disabilities and provide quality education? To what extent are trained teachers satisfied with the trainings? How is the content of trainings used in practice?</p>	<p>Information will be supplemented with a data review of provided training modules.</p>
<p>2.4. To what extent are inclusive school teachers capable of developing Individual Education Plans (IEPs)? What methodological support is provided to teachers in developing IEPs? How does the needs assessment implemented by the Republican Multidisciplinary Assessment Centre (RMAC) support teachers in developing IEPs? Is information on the assessed needs made explicit in developing comprehensive IEPs? Are IEPs aligned with the needs of children with SEN? Are parents of children with special education needs aware of IEPs? What are parents' perceptions of whether the teaching process is organized according to IEPs?</p>	<p>Key questions under objective 2.4 will be surveyed through a document review of existing IEPs, KIIs with representative of RMAC, IDIs with school principals and SSIs with teachers. In addition, IDIs with parents of children with special education needs enrolled in inclusive classes will be conducted to identify the extent of awareness on IEPs and the level of their application during the teaching process.</p>
<p>2.5. What is the school community members' (teachers, parents, students) perception of inclusive education? What intended and unintended outcomes (both positive and negative) have occurred as a result of adopting IE? What main challenges/risks are schools faced with and how they are addressed? How do children with special education needs benefit from the inclusion? What major changes (both positive and negative) took place in the lives of children with special education needs after enrolment into inclusive classes? Are there school-aged children with special education needs who had been enrolled in inclusive schools and are currently excluded from them? If so, what are the main reasons? What academic progress has been made by children with special education needs?</p>	<p>Key questions under objective 2.5 are designed to identify perceptions and attitudes towards the IE system. They should be surveyed through IDIs with parents of children with special education needs and school principals; FGDs with the parental community; semi-structured interviews with teachers and self-administered questioning with students.</p>
<p>2.6 How well are children with special education needs integrated into school life? How does inclusive education assist their integration into social life on a wider scale? How tolerant are students towards children with special education needs?</p>	<p>Objective 2.6 will be evaluated through IDIs with parents of children with special education needs, IDIs with school principals, and interviews with teachers. Special attention will be paid to the <i>Sociometric test</i>⁷ with students, to identify the level of tolerance</p>

⁷ The Sociometric test is one of the ways to study intergroup dynamics of social relations, and can be applied as a way of measuring inclusiveness within classes where children with special education needs are involved. The test consist of several questions: With whom do you want to sit in the class? With who do you definitely don't want to sit? With whom do you want to do your homework?

	towards children with special education needs, as well as to illustrate integration possibilities and challenges.
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3. Effectiveness and efficiency: accountability and sustainability mechanisms

3.1. What kind of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system was established to track the dynamics and effectiveness of IE in Armenia? What are the main indicators and targets outlined in the M&E system? What measurement and verification means are incorporated in the M&E system? How was the M&E system designed and who is responsible for its implementation? With what frequency are monitoring and evaluation conducted? To what extent are the evaluations participatory?	Since questions under objectives 3.1 and 3.2 are designed to address the programmatic capacities of sustainability and accountability, the core methods of evaluation are expected to be KIIs designed with the participation of experts from state and non-governmental organizations.
3.2. How are the M&E results documented? How, when and by whom are the results used? What decisions have been reached on the basis of M&E results? To what extent are the results open to the public? What feedback mechanisms are used to ensure that results are shared among stakeholders?	
3.3. To what extent has the IE program established/enhanced capacities, processes and systems that are likely to sustain? What capabilities do inclusive school staff have for facilitating the further application of inclusive education?	In addition to the above-mentioned methods, IDIs with school principals and semi-structured interviews with teachers will be conducted to survey school capacities for the further application of IE system. To identify the general ability and willingness of school communities to facilitate inclusivity in their schools, FGDs with parents, IDIs with parents of children with special education needs and self-administered questioning with students will be applied as well.
3.4. What elements of inclusive education can be applied as a general model in all schools? To what extent are schools supportive to the inclusive education model (e.g. how do teachers, parents, students encourage and assist disabled children's participation in school events) and willing to sustain the program achievements.	

Research methodology

The evaluation survey was conducted in line with the objectives defined in the above section. Primary data was collected through qualitative and quantitative research methods. A review was also conducted of secondary data. The aforementioned set of methods allowed for effective data triangulation, valid and verified evaluation findings, and well-grounded recommendations at the end of the exercise. The evaluation tools were designed to ensure the involvement of all groups of stakeholders in the collection of primary data.

A brief description of the evaluation methods and sampling strategy as defined by the research objectives is presented below.

Research method	Target group/data source	Evaluation tool	Sample size	Total
In-depth interviews (IDI)	Parents of children with special education needs	IDI guide	At least 2 per school	68
Key-informant interviews (KII)	School principals Experts from respective institutions	KII guide	34 KII with principals At least 1 interview from each respective institution (at least 10 KII)	44
Focus group discussions (FGD)	Parents	FGD guide	At least 1 per school	34
Document review	State and non-governmental reports on IE in Armenia, corresponding legislation, data on # of children with disabilities included in mainstream education	Content and context analysis	All available documents related to IE	N/A
Semi-structured interviews (SSI)	Students Teachers School social worker/psychologies	Semi-structured questionnaire	1200 (600 for teachers and 600 for pupils) 34 (School social worker/psychologies)	1200
Self-administered interviews (SAI)	Students involved in inclusive classes	Self-administered questionnaire (including <i>Sociometric test</i>)		
Observation	Target schools	Observation matrix	34	34

Sampling

Based on the ToR requirements for evaluation geography, the evaluation team considers the number of years schools have been educating children with special education needs as a basis for sampling. The ToR requires sampling among schools in those regions where there are more than five operational inclusive schools. While reviewing the list of all schools in Armenia that apply IE (requested from the MoES) it turned out that in two out of six regions (Lori and Gegharkunik) there are seven and five inclusive schools operating, respectively. The evaluation team considers it is not statistically reasonable to select a few among five to seven schools

(even from the perspective of qualitative targeted sampling), and suggested evaluating all target schools in the mentioned areas. This will allow for a comprehensive and comparative analysis with a wider perspective. As for Tavush region, six out of the 15 (40%) of the schools that officially announced that they were operating as inclusive schools⁸ will be included in the survey. Hence, the evaluation team developed the following sampling scheme.

Evaluation area	# of inclusive schools operating in the area	# of sampled inclusive schools
Aragatsotn	1	1
Tavush	15	6
Lori	7	7
Vayots Dzor	3	3
Gegharkunik	5	5
Yerevan	49	12
TOTAL	80	34

The following **sample design** was applied for teachers and pupils:

Teachers: n=587, with $\gamma=95\%$ confidence and $\Delta=4.0$ margin of error (plus 1-2% for possible invalid questionnaires) with lower confidence interval and higher margin of error.

Pupils: n=599, with $\gamma=95\%$ confidence and $\Delta=4.0$ margin of error (plus 1-2% for possible invalid questionnaires) with lower confidence interval and higher margin of error.

Thus sampled number of **600** teachers and **600** pupils is representative.

The sample has been calculated based on the overall number of teachers and pupils in the selected regions (Yerevan, Aragatsotn, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Lori and Shirak) with a total of 24,666 teachers and 227,933 pupils.

⁸ The data was taken from the list requested from the MoES based on decree of the Minister of Education and Science as of «11» 05 2007, N428 and respective amendments: decrees N554-U/Ք «28» -06-2008; . N 553-U/Ք «17»-.06.2009; N 623-U/Ք «28 »-.06.2010; N 760 - U/Ք «27» 06 2011; N637- U/Ք «25» 06 2012; N 841-U/Ք «12.» 09.2012.

Chapter 1: Inclusive Education System in the Republic of Armenia

1.1 Legislative grounds for inclusive education: international and domestic legislature

Access to educational services has been a main topic of concern in international discussions since the 1990s, when the two most important documents were adopted: the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*⁹ and the *World Declaration on Education for All*¹⁰.

The development of ideological and conceptual principles of inclusive education took place four years later, in 1994, in the framework of the Salamanca Statement, reaffirmed in the 2000 Education World Forum in Senegal. The Salamanca Statement and Action Plan have established a framework for the implementation of education for children, youth and elderly people with special educational needs¹¹. In particular, the declaration states that every child has educational peculiarities and has a basic right to education. Therefore, the development of education systems and the implementation of educational programs should take into account the characteristics of a wide diversity of special educational needs. Persons with special education needs (SEN) should be able to study in mainstream schools while being provided with a child-centered pedagogical approach to address these needs¹².

UNESCO's 1996 Convention against Discrimination in Education¹³ significantly contributed to the further development of the conceptual foundations and international legal regulations of inclusive education. Later, in 2005, UNESCO circulated two major definitions: "inclusion" and "inclusive education" (IE). "Inclusion" was defined as a process addressing the needs of all learners in order to boost participation in **education, culture and communities** and to **reduce the level of isolation in and from education**¹⁴. IE was, defined as **a process aimed at meeting the needs of a diverse pool of learners through reducing the level of isolation in and from education**¹⁵.

IE is characterized by six features: 1) Education should be based on the principle of diversity rather than homogeneity; 2) The educational process should be organized through the use of appropriate methods and approaches addressed at meeting **each child's** specific needs; 3) Schools need to develop targeted subject curricula to balance unity and uniqueness; 4) Schools must identify and neutralize the factors that hinder full participation of all students in academic life; 5) IE should bring deep and long-term transformation in the organization and management of educational processes; 6) IE presumes development of support mechanisms and resources for teachers, administrative staff, students, parents and other stakeholders of IE system¹⁶.

In 2008, during the 48th session of the International Conference on Education in Geneva, a number of key provisions were discussed highlighting the conceptual basis for the development and implementation of IE policies¹⁷. There was a particular focus on the attempts of differentiating between fundamentally divergent goals and objectives of such seemingly identical concepts as "inclusive education", "education for all" and "integration in education". The concept of "education for all" should not be identified with that of IE, although both are targeted at increasing access to education. However IE is intended to ensure quality education through eradicating any form of exclusion. Its goal is to enhance the individual capacities of each person through the provision of quality education.

⁹ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

¹⁰ http://www.nepcr.gov.in/Reports/UNESCO_World_Declaration_on_Education_for_All%201990.pdf

¹¹ http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF, p viii

¹² <http://inclusion.am/wp-content/uploads/Salamanka.pdf>, p iv.

¹³ http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=12949&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

¹⁴ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001402/140224e.pdf>, p13

¹⁵ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001868/186807e.pdf>, p13.

¹⁶ *ibid*, pp14-15

¹⁷ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001868/186807e.pdf>

IE should not be identified with integration either. Integration provides for the participation of persons with SEN in educational processes, while inclusion guarantees everyone's right to quality education. In the case of integration, students need to individually adapt to the actual school system (subject curricula, teaching-learning methods, values, etc.). The schools, for their part, try to provide the children with SEN with customized programs, differentiated methods, and IE teachers. Such an approach puts a strong emphasis on the SEN status and segregates children with SEN from those to whom mainstream, undifferentiated methods and approaches are applied. On the other hand, in the case of IE, the school transforms itself to meet the specific needs of each student. Consequently, it suggests a shift in scenario where students no longer need to adjust to the school, as the school accommodates every student's needs. Naturally, the definition above and the implementation of the inclusive education approach involve **in-depth transformations of education systems that require a consolidated approach to including IE in legislative acts**.

The RA Law on the Education of Persons with Special Education Needs and the Inclusive Education Program were adopted in Armenia in 2005¹⁸. The latter stipulates the implementation of three core provisions in inclusive education: 1) Children with SEN have equal rights to choose a state educational institution and a compulsory education program; 2) Children with SEN have the right to access special pedagogical, medical, psychological and other services; 3) To foster the natural development of children with SEN, it is preferable for them to receive their education without being segregated from their family or from society.

The Law on the Education of Persons with SEN defines IE as joint institutional education and vocational training of persons with and without SEN through the creation of special conditions for SEN. This definition does not imply that **all students** share equal educational opportunities; rather, it emphasizes that they are **jointly educated with particular attention on providing more specific conditions for persons with SEN**. In other words, the school assures integration through joint education. According to the law, the education of persons with SEN can be conducted in state and non-state (private) mainstream schools and vocational education and training institutions with adapted conditions for SEN. However the law does not define the required conditions for schools where students with SEN may study. Instead, it stipulates the medical, psychological and pedagogical assessment of special education needs, the certification and funding means of IE organization, cooperation with international organizations, and so forth.

We would like to address to this law and a number of key sub-concepts concerning IE implementation procedure approved by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) in 2008. These sub-concepts define the IE system in Armenia and the elements of actual implementation, which will be presented in Chapter 3 of this report.

1.2 Key elements of inclusive education system

The Law on the Education of Persons with SEN, the state program on inclusive education and the provisions of IE implementation regulate the operation of the IE system, establishing relationships between its constituent elements, their degree of interdependence and areas of interaction. Inclusive schools (IS) belong to the mainstream education system, and, accordingly, are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science. ISs are regulated by local government authorities, regional municipalities and, in Yerevan, by the Municipal Department of Education. The latter is responsible for the implementation of MoES decisions (the process of conferring IS status, distribution of budget lines, training, etc.) in regional ISs. In some cases, inclusive schools are supervised directly by the MoES.

The first step of admitting a child to an inclusive school is through the child's **special education needs assessment** (SENA), which is performed by the state-accredited Medical, Psychological, Pedagogical Assessment Center (MPPAC). The SENA defines the child's specific conditions, identifies his/her abilities and capacities, and provides advice on the effective organization of education processes and pedagogical methods. There are three MPPACs in Armenia – two branches in Yerevan, and one each in the regions of

¹⁸ RA Law on the Education of People with Special Education Needs, <http://edu.am/index.php?id=97&topMenu=-1&menu1=85&menu2=89&arch=0#g3>

Syunik and Lori. A mere three functioning centers cannot guarantee the timely assessment of children's educational needs throughout the country. This issue has been repeatedly emphasized by the participants of this research project, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

In order to define conditions for children with SEN, they may be asked to undergo a SENA on the basis of the parent's (or legal guardian's) application. MPPACs certify that a child has SEN based on the conclusion of a territorial administration official.

An individualized curriculum (IC) is one of the key components of inclusive education. According to the sixth and seventh paragraphs of the state order on the organization of inclusive education¹⁹, every child with SEN must be educated through an IC designed by the inclusive school a month after the child's admission. The IC is developed with the support of inclusive education specialists, special educators and psychologists. The IC is the guiding document for measuring the child's academic performance and making decisions on possible academic advancement and/or transfer to another class. In terms of IE system effectiveness, the next key question refers to the criteria for inclusive schools, with a particular focus on *physical, technical and professional resources*. Article 23 of the Law on the Education of Persons with SEN focuses on the provision of technical and methodological resources by educational institutions that practice IE. In particular, depending on the types and forms of educational institutions involved in the education of persons with SEN, their technical base must include the “necessary” learning spaces and facilities. Such a formulation is rather vague and leaves room for a wide range of interpretations.

The same law stipulates that children with SEN should be provided with customized technical support, computer classrooms, including rehabilitation rooms, organization of sports and public events, catering, medical care, preventive health measures and rehabilitation, cleaning and sanitary service provision and other functions in accordance with the charter of educational institutions. Children with SEN are provided with textbooks, stationary and special support equipment, methodological materials. The provision of technical and methodological facilities is financed by the state budget and other sources not forbidden by law. However overall, it is not clear who is responsible for funding and which financial resources cover the above-mentioned items. There is a certain level of regulation only in terms of the provision of professional resources.

According to the Inclusive Education Program, IE policy is based on child-centered pedagogy. The creation of the multidisciplinary team is an important component of this method, as it entails a variety of specialist stakeholders in IE, such as mainstream teachers, special educators, psychologists, and speech therapists, as well as parents of children with SEN and team coordinators. It should be noted that the multidisciplinary team *per se* was not included in the Tavush region pilot project; schools that participated in the pilot program had a special education teacher and teachers' assistants. (The Tavush model will be discussed in following sections.) One of the primary functions of the multidisciplinary team is to assess each child's educational needs and develop an IC customized to those needs.²⁰

Children with SEN are taught by mainstream subject teachers alongside children without SEN. The IE system requires active collaboration between subject teachers and multidisciplinary teams in order to develop teaching methods, approaches and individual plans for children with SEN. According to the state decision on IE provision, the parents or guardians of children with SEN must also participate in designing the IC. Moreover, the parents must also have objectives to achieve in the IC and must take part in developing these objectives and their corresponding action plans.

It can be concluded that the efficiency of IE is driven by the following factors: 1) identification and timely professional assessment of children with SEN; b) development of IC according to the needs of children with SEN; c) professional capacity of teaching team involved with SEN students, d) cooperation between

¹⁹ State order on the organisation of inclusive education

http://www.edu.am/DownloadFile/4389arm-nerarakan_karg-1281.pdf

²⁰ <http://www.edu.am/index.php?id=553&topMenu=-1&menu1=9&menu2=137>

multidisciplinary teams and subject teachers; e) active participation of parents in designing IC; f) accessibility and equipment of IS with adapted technical appliances. The causality and interaction between the mentioned factors, as well as contradictions concerning the actual implementation of each factor will be explained in Chapter 3.

The next part of the report will present the short history of the introduction and implementation of the IE system in Armenia, the dynamics of IS growth and their regional distribution as of 2012, the typical model of financing IS, as well as experimental IE projects that are currently underway and the concept of overall inclusiveness.

Chapter 2: Introduction and implementation of inclusive education in Armenia

2.1 Introduction and implementation of the inclusive education system in RA

The introduction of the inclusive education system in Armenia has undergone several phases of development. As previously mentioned, the legislative basis for IE was formed in 2005. However its actual implementation started in 2001, when a tripartite agreement was signed between the relevant state education authorities, Yerevan secondary school No. 27, and the Bridge of Hope NGO. Under this agreement, school No. 27 was recognized as the first public institution implementing IE in the Republic of Armenia. This was entirely the personal initiative of the school’s and NGO’s directorate. During the first year, the school hosted only one student – a Bridge of Hope beneficiary with locomotive impairment – who successfully completed elementary and secondary school.

According to the school's former principal, Mrs. Bakhshyan, during the first year of IE implementation, the school faced a number of issues such as complaints and prejudiced attitudes among the parents and teaching staff. It was possible to partially overcome these problems only a year or two after the introduction of IE, thanks to the persistent explanations and demonstrations of SEN children's academic achievements.

It was not until 2007 that secondary school No. 27 was granted the status of a “state inclusive school” by the MoES. From 2007 onwards, ISs in Armenia saw the following growth and distribution patterns: In 2007, ten secondary schools were conferred the status of IS and they were all located in the capital. Seven more ISs were certified in 2008, including schools in the regions of Ararat, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor and Lori. From 2009 to 2012 the dynamics of growth changed by +/- 1 school. If counting the average from the overall number of ISs in a time period of five years, the dynamics of growth reach up to 16 ISs per year. Similar growth dynamics are reflected in the 2011-2015 State Program for Education Development.

2007-2012 IS growth	
Year	Number of ISs
2007	10
2008	17
2009	18
2010	17
2011	18
2012	18
Total	98

Thus, as of 2012, there are 98 functioning ISs in the Republic of Armenia. Distribution, however, is highly unequal. More than 50% of the schools are located in the capital, while the regions of Ararat, Vayots Dzor and Syunik have only one IS each.

There is active cooperation between inclusive schools and non-governmental and international organizations, though this is not the case in all five studied regions. Some ISs in Gegharkunik (except for Martuni), Lori and the Kanaker-Zeytun community in Yerevan cooperate with World Vision-Armenia. Bridge of Hope is active in Yerevan and Tavush. Such an unequal distribution of international and non-governmental donor resources causes discontent among IS principals. In some regions, resources from non-governmental/international donors are quite visible, while other regions mainly operate with state support only, which does not allow for quality in inclusive education.

2.2 Typical financing mechanism for inclusive schools

According to Article 22 of the Law on the Education of Persons with SEN, the state provides an added budget line for IS operation through targeted budgeting. It should be noted that IS status does not bring change to the overall school funding formula. On the contrary, it introduces two actual financing formulas for children with and without SEN.

The typical funding formula for mainstream school applies to the students without SEN. The total amount equals the student number (SN) x amount per student (APS) + maintenance fee (MF). Each student's per annum amount is multiplied by the coefficient 0.793, 1.102 or 1.141 according to the elementary, secondary and high school levels, respectively. The annual amount per student without SEN amounts to around 106,000 AMD.

In the case of students with SEN, the initial funding allocated per annum is not officially defined. One month before the beginning of the academic year, the MoES presents the number of children with SEN from officially recognized ISs to the Ministry of Finance. The total number of children with SEN is then redistributed into groups of 15. Each group is managed by a fulltime special educator, another educator, psychologists, and a cook. Based on government resolution No. 1365, the funding covers nutrition, transportation, water and electricity costs for children with SEN. Other expenditures are determined through the established procedure of financing mainstream schools. The Ministry of Finance calculates the annual budget and channels amounts to the regional departments for redistribution.

Experts from the MoES and the Ministry of Finance state that the system of financing the education of children with SEN does not define the amount allocated per child. Meanwhile, the principals of all 34 ISs that participated in the study interpret the funding system in terms of amounts granted per child. In contrast to the annual sum of 100,000 AMD allocated to children without SEN, Children with SEN receive four to five times more funding than children without SEN, amounting to 400,000-500,000 AMD per year.

According to all the surveyed principals (except for those in Tavush region) this amount is spent exclusively on: 1) nutrition of children with SEN (781 AMD per day); 2) transportation (200 AMD per day); and 3) specialists' salaries.

The ratio between financial investment and quality assurance in IE is another important issue to be considered. On the one hand, some field experts believe that state budget allocations to ISs cannot sufficiently provide quality education, as the government does not allot financial resources to replenish physical and technical equipment inventory. On the other hand, the principals and the multidisciplinary teams of the studied ISs consider state funding **mostly satisfactory** by drawing parallels with the financing models for students without SEN.

In comparison with non-inclusive students inclusive students get 3-4 times more money. It means that the state takes care of the children ... well we believe that we have no reason to complain...

- Excerpt from KII with an IS principal, Yerevan

Moreover, principals discuss the issue of IS funding not from the perspective of quality assurance of educational services, but from the viewpoint of physical access to IE. They highlight only the scarcity of budget allocations for transportation. In particular, when an inclusive school accommodates children from a range of regional communities, including remote rural areas, lack of public transport causes up to ten times higher actual expenditures than the state defined norm of 100-200 AMD per day.

There are two children from the city of Gavar who currently live in the community house of Karmir village, because they cannot commute to school every day. I bring them with me to school every day... I have contacted various organizations trying to arrange the transportation of these children. However no company agreed to sign a contract because of the meager pay.

- Excerpt from personal interview with an IS principal, Gegharkunik

According to the research findings, there are functioning mechanisms of transparency and accountability in budgetary expenditures on ISs. Out of the 34 studied schools, the administration of 16 schools believes that there is no need to secure the transparency of IE budgetary expenditures as they are predominantly salary based. This view was particularly common among ISs in Tavush region as well as the target schools in other regions, whose administration perceives budget transparency as a mere submission of reports to the state authorities. In 10 of the studied ISs, the administration provides information on the transparency of expenditures only to the parents of children with SEN, as it considers the inclusion of other stakeholders groups unnecessary, since it may provoke different perceptions.

Every time the parents sign their child's meal plan, they witness what the money is being spent on. Besides the amount for transportation is given to the parents in cash... I do not think that the parents of children without SEN need to be informed about the amount of money channeled for other children ... it will provoke unnecessary rumors.

- Excerpt from personal interview with an IS principal, Vayots Dzor

Only eight ISs ensure maximum transparency in school governance by either submitting financial reports to the school management or posting them on the school's information board.

2.3. Implementation of the inclusive education pilot project in Tavush region

In 2010, five years after the passage of the Law on the Education of Persons with SEN, Bridge of Hope NGO and the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) jointly introduced a pilot project, which was implemented in Tavush region only. Tavush was chosen because the NGO was actively involved in this particular region of Armenia. As Bridge of Hope director Susanna Tadevosyan states, the goal of the project is to create conditions in all mainstream schools of Tavush for the inclusion of children with SEN. A child is accepted to an IS after being classified by the MPPAC as having SEN, and after the national authority decides to admit the child to an IS.

The Tavush model allows us to include children with SEN into mainstream schools and take into account their individual needs even in case the child's needs have not been acknowledged by the MPPAC as a condition for special education, or if the parent has not applied for the assessment, but the school, nonetheless, believes that the child needs a special approach. Since 2010, the implementation of inclusive education is based on two different systems: the *Tavush model* and that of other regions. During the pilot project, the position of **teacher's assistant** was introduced in 77 mainstream schools in Tavush.

In 2012, on the basis of state decision No. 46, the government has confirmed an experimental model of funding for children with SEN who attend mainstream schools in Tavush region. According to this decision, the number of teacher's assistants must equal to 10% of the average annual number of non-SEN students.

Therefore it is assumed that 10% of the children from Tavush schools are in constant need of support, which is provided by teacher's assistants.

The teacher's assistant position is funded according to the following formula:

$$\text{IE funding} = (\text{TAN} * \text{AMSTA} + \text{SSP}) * \text{NM}$$

where

TAN* is the number of teacher's assistants

AMSTA ** is the average monthly salary of teacher's assistant

SSP is the compulsory social security payment

NM is the number of months in the estimated period

The average monthly salary of a teacher's assistant is equal to 80% of a mainstream teacher's salary.

Naturally, this model of financing is less costly than the typical funding model of other regions that have additional funding criteria. As of 2012, 77 mainstream schools operate in Tavush, of which only 15 are officially recognized as inclusive schools, i.e. schools accommodating children classified as SEN.

We find it necessary to draw the reader's attention on an important aspect, which should be taken into account regarding IS research in Tavush region. During this research, only officially accredited ISs have been examined, with a special focus on six of them. Hence further data and conclusions refer to these schools only.

Let us consider the funding of 15 state accredited ISs. As there are children with SEN enrolled in ISs, the law calls for multidisciplinary teams in the schools. However, instead of multidisciplinary teams, the mentioned schools employ special education teachers. The number of special education teachers is determined by the number of children with SEN, which is however deducted not from the overall number of SEN students in all ISs (as in case of typical funding model), but from their number in a given school. The students are then distributed into groups of 15 and each group is managed by a fulltime special educator. Unlike the typical model of financing, in experimental funding model, the average monthly salary of the special educator is equivalent to the mainstream teacher's monthly salary. The same 15 ISs also have teacher's assistants, whose number and funding is calculated by the formula given above.

In terms of numbers, according to the principals of six ISs in Tavush region, the annual budget share for children with SEN in the experimental model of Tavush is within the range of 150,000-200,000 AMD, which is about half that of the typical funding model of ISs.

Summing up the current operating system of inclusive education, the following conclusions can be derived:

1. As of 2012, there are 98 schools functioning in the Republic of Armenia as officially recognized inclusive schools. The state-conferred status of IS implies that the children in these schools are assessed by MPPAC for SEN and classified accordingly.
2. T 83 out of 98 ISs are financed through the typical model defined by the added funding criteria of government resolution No. 1365. These schools have multidisciplinary teams consisting of special education teachers, educators, psychologists, etc. They are also receive funding for the nutrition and transportation of SEN students.
3. Tavush region hosts the first IE pilot project. All 77 mainstreams schools of Tavush have of teacher's assistants. It can be assumed that 10% of the children from Tavush schools are in constant need of support, which is provided by teacher's assistants. 62 out of 77 schools in Tavush region do not have children assessed by MPPAC as having SEN, and the only teaching support staff they employ are teacher's assistants. Those schools are not officially recognized as inclusive schools.

4. There are 15 officially recognized inclusive schools in Tavush that accommodate children classified as SEN. These schools have teacher's assistants and special education teachers. Special education teacher's salaries are funded according to the experimental state model of financing, without added criteria of funding. A special education teacher's salary is equivalent to the average monthly salary of a subject teacher; teacher's assistants receive wages equal to about 80% of a subject teacher's salary.
5. Studying typical approaches to the implementation of IE in the Tavush pilot project and elsewhere in Armenia is particularly important now, as in 2012 MoES has started circulating a legislative initiative under which the current mainstream education system is expected to shift to overall inclusion, and by 2022, all schools should be conferred the official status of IS.

2.4 Towards overall inclusion

In 2012, in order to avoid discrimination, the MoES suggested to take out of circulation the current Law on the Education of Persons with SEN and include SEN into the general education law. This decision signifies removing the line dividing inclusive and non-inclusive schools and introducing the concept of overall inclusion, through which all mainstream schools will gradually become inclusive. This is a risky initiative as it requires accurately calculated state budgeting and investments in IS. According to the minister of education and science, by 2022, all mainstream schools should open their doors to children with SEN. However, neither project experts nor representatives from MoES/Ministry of Finance can forecast the dynamics of IS growth by 2022. No one can accurately give the capacity of the state budget to foster about 1400 ISs in Armenia. But what is more important, no principal financing mechanisms are foreseen to guarantee inclusion for all. Will the current typical model of mainstream school funding extend to all schools? Will the Tavush pilot project funding model shift to the typical model, or should new financing mechanisms be designed? These questions remain unanswered by relevant authorities and field representatives. Some experts prefer the minimum cost funding model of the Tavush project, without considering whether this model provides quality education.

Today there is a certain degree of prediction clarity concerning IS growth dynamics for the period of 2011-2015. The State Program for Education Development calls for creating opportunities for inclusive education **in all mainstream schools**.²¹ In accordance with the target criteria of the program, by 2015 overall 110 ISs should be functioning in Armenia. This suggests that within the period of 2013-2015, another 12 ISs would join the existing 98 ISs. This number, according to an expert from the Ministry of Finance, is based on the approximate estimate of the MoES request and the budgeting capacities of the state, without excluding the possibility of a further increase. After 2015, the number of inclusive schools that will be added will be determined based on program achievements and funding opportunities.

Thus, over the past 12 years of inclusive education in Armenia, the IE program has outgrown the single school initiative and transformed into a strong ambition for overall inclusiveness, embedded in the draft legislation of RA. During the past 12 years, a number of accomplishments, achievements, challenges and problems have been recorded. Some of them are discussed and reflected in the draft law on amendments to general education, while the others are still inherent to schools.

At the current stage of the development of inclusive education, we would like refer to the analysis of its actual implementation, as it would help to identify the achievements and challenges of IE and to assess the level of preparedness of the general education system for the transition to overall inclusion.

²¹ RoA State Program for Education Development 2011-2015, pp 47-48. The programme is attached to the project report in Annex 2.

Chapter 3: Introducing inclusive education in schools

3.1 The process of conferring inclusive status to mainstream schools

The process of conferring inclusive status to mainstream schools consists of several stages. First, the school submits an application to the local government body, providing a rationale for granting it inclusive status. The main justifying document entails the package of students' needs assessments provided by the MPPAC. Then, all submitted documents are reviewed by the corresponding state education authorities. Following the MoES decision to grant inclusive status to the school, the principal submits a list of the key staff members, who are then trained by the National Institute of Education (NIE). At the final stage, the school receives state funding by added criteria (typical funding) or pilot/experimental funding (in the case of Tavush region.)

Now let us analyze the actual process of conferring the status of inclusive school to the ISs that participated in this research project. According to the research findings, the majority of current ISs have individually taken the initiative to apply to the relevant authorities in order to be officially accredited as ISs. Of the 34 schools, 22 classify themselves as *initiators of the process*.

Our school is a little different from other schools. First and foremost, it wasn't told to become inclusive, we have applied for inclusive status on our own initiative. In 2009, the school had a pedagogical council during which the staff discussed the destiny of 44 special needs students... and decided to apply to the corresponding assessment center, where the children were referred to... 36 children were eventually transferred to the inclusive department, and the school became inclusive.

- Excerpt from KII with an IS principal, Yerevan

Only a small number of schools consider that their initiative was provoked by the study of local or foreign best practice and the urge to adapt foreign experience to the local context. Among the few, Mkhitar Sebastatsi Educational Complex has conducted an intensive study of foreign practice. Local experience firstly involves the inclusion policy of school No. 27. The latter's experience and achievements have stimulated the introduction of IE in other schools, including elementary schools No. 125 and No. 79, as well as the secondary schools in Vayots Dzor and Vagharshapat.

Some schools explain that the decision to take on IE was made based on their principals' personal initiatives and attitudes regarding the heightened role of inclusive education in Armenia. Such an explanation is quite subjective and unsupported by facts, especially considering the significant amount of investment that schools receive through typical funding model. It jeopardizes the overall status of inclusiveness, bringing it down to the principal's choice.

The other ISs claim that the suggestion to become inclusive came from supervision agencies. These 12 surveyed schools can be considered as "adapted to educational reforms". These schools were prompted to move to IS status based of several factors: 1) the number and geographical location of students, as in case of No. 1 secondary schools of Jermuk and Vayk; 2) accessibility and physical conditions of the school, as for example, in elementary school No. 5 in Alaverdi, which got ramps and customized classrooms after renovation.

3.2 Analysis of accessibility, technical and methodological resources in inclusive schools

As stated in the first section of the report, the Law on the Education of Persons with SEN vaguely defines the physical accessibility criteria for ISs. It refers to *the necessary areas / infrastructures* without defining their content. In contrast, the principals of surveyed ISs have a better understanding of physical accessibility criteria. Physical accessibility consists of the following criteria:

1. *Presence of ramps inside and outside the buildings*

32 out of 34 surveyed schools have ramps at the entrance to the buildings. The remaining two explain the lack of physical accessibility by either the absence of students with physical/locomotive impairments, or the fact that students refuse to come to school in a wheelchair. In Yerevan, school ramps were built with the support of the city hall and through school budgets. In the regions, school ramps were built with the financial support of local NGOs (such as Bridge of Hope), international donor organizations (such as World Vision) and partial financial inputs from schools. None of the surveyed schools met the criteria of accessibility inside the buildings. Even elementary school No. 125 in Yerevan (which was completely renovated through financial support from the Lincy Foundation) did not have ramps installed inside the school building.

Some schools try to organize the entire education experience of children with SEN on the first floor. However, this approach does not apply in the case of secondary schools, where students have sessions in laboratory classrooms located on the second floor of the building. As a rule, classmates are forced to carry the children with SEN to the second floor. This is very dangerous, particularly for children with physical/locomotive impairments, as it can cause serious damage to their health. In other instances, children simply do not participate in laboratory sessions, missing out on an important component of quality education – hands on, practical learning.

2. *Adapted sanitation facilities*

Only one of the surveyed schools, Yerevan school No. 125, has sanitation facilities partially adapted to the needs of children with SEN. Other schools are equipped with typical bathrooms, which are in very poor conditions, particularly in the regions.

3. *Designated cafeteria*

All 34 schools have designated cafeterias. Some children with SEN are in need of regular nutrition and medication. The provision of these services requires the schools to have designated cafeterias.

4. *Accessible gymnasium*

The surveyed schools are not equipped with accessible gymnasiums and they do not employ specialized instructors to train physically impaired children.

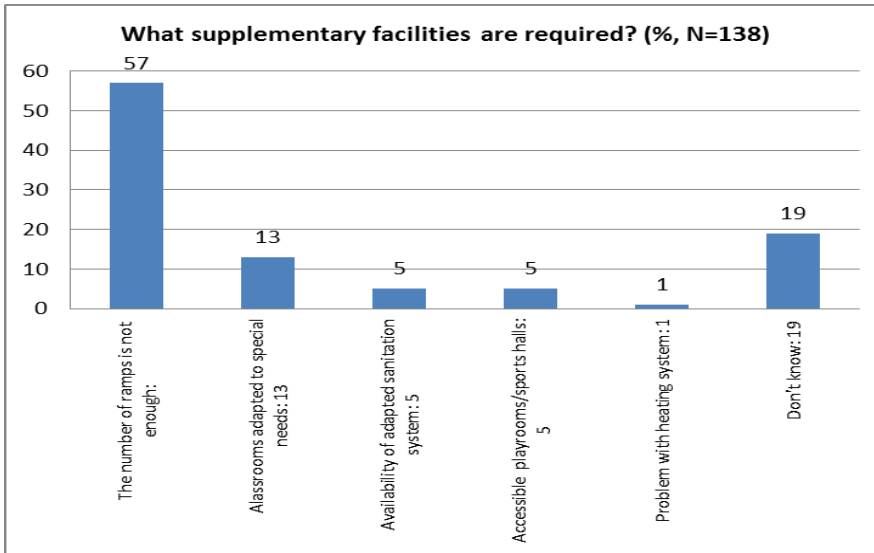
5. *Accessible classrooms, with adapted desks and wider doorways*

There are no specially adapted classrooms in the schools. It is financially burdensome for schools to adapt the classrooms to special needs, therefore classes are held in mainstream classrooms.

Each of the described criteria has been explored at length. Together with the principals, the research team has reviewed and taken photos of the many physical accessibility criteria.²² Then, together with the principals and teaching staff, the research team tried to assess the extent to which the schools met the criteria, and came to the following conclusion. **Out of the five specified criteria, the majority of schools meet only the first criterion partially and the third one completely. Therefore, in terms of physical conditions the surveyed 34 inclusive schools can be classified as underequipped.** Most principals explain this underequipped by the absence of students with SEN. However this is not an acceptable explanation because the status of ISs is by no means "situational". On the contrary, it implies fulltime preparedness of ISs to accommodate students with various special needs.

²² Photos will be provided as required.

If the administration and special education staff in ISs have a broader understanding of the physical accessibility in schools, the mainstream teaching staff identify physical accessibility with the presence of ramps only. For this reason, the vast majority of surveyed teachers (56%) consider the school to be properly adapted. Still, 57% believe that it is necessary to increase the number of ramps.²³



Technical equipment

It has been previously mentioned, that the law prescribes ISs to be equipped with quite a comprehensive technical base. It includes technical facilities for the organization of individualized education, rehabilitation rooms, a system of sanitation and hygiene, as well as domestic maintenance products procured by funds defined by law and other legal means. In contrast to physical accessibility, technical equipment of ISs was estimated to be generally sufficient. These schools are supported by the MPPAC, which provides them with methodological manuals, as well as international and local non-governmental organizations that facilitate the procurement of modern didactic materials and accessories. All observed schools have special resource rooms/centers, some of which are renovated and fairly well equipped (for instance in Tavush region), while others require additional maintenance.

Teachers and members of the multidisciplinary team have highlighted two ways on replenishing the technical base of ISs:

- 1) It is desirable to have a special room for different members of the multidisciplinary team, in particular, the psychologist and speech therapist, as it facilitates their work with children. The common resource room does not provide such an opportunity.
- 2) Didactic materials need to be updated. Teachers and special educators teach children with SEN through games and interactive activities, which children often tire of very quickly. Hence new teaching-learning materials can help to better manage and innovate individual work with children with SEN.

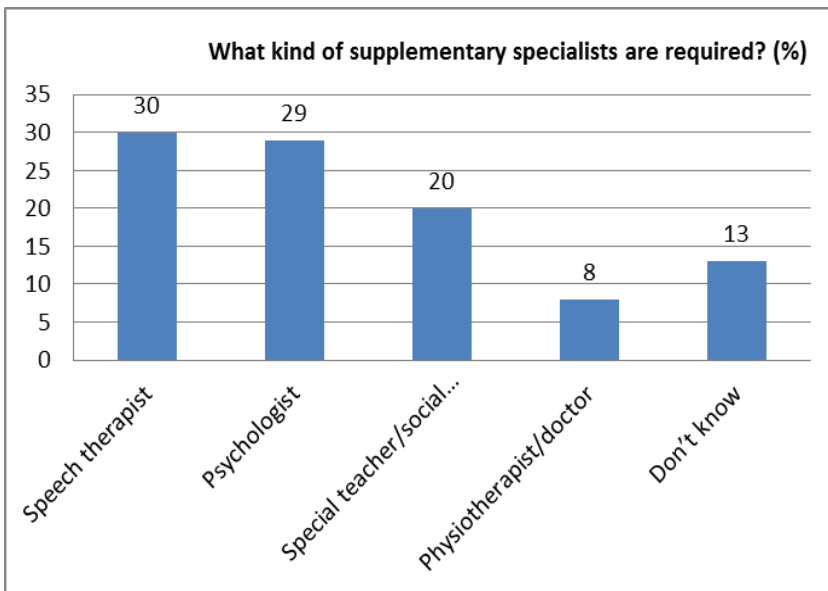
²³ Detailed analysis of the data is attached to the project report in Annex 4.

3.3 Analysis of professional teaching resources: Multidisciplinary teams and subject teachers

The multidisciplinary team is the key component in administering IE. The team is responsible for developing individualized curricula (IC), carrying out daily activities with children, ensuring progress in education, and creating collaborative relationships between the parents of children with SEN and subject teachers.

Upon evaluating the activities of multidisciplinary teams in the 34 surveyed ISs, three global issues can be singled out. First, there is no common approach to team composition or to the functions of its members. The MoES stipulates that the team should be comprised of a team coordinator and various professionals (mainstream teachers, special education teachers, speech therapists, psychologists) involved in the child's education. However no official document provides job descriptions for specialists or defines their professional roles and responsibilities. Due to the lack of clear regulations, the composition of a multidisciplinary team and perceptions of professional functions differ among regions and schools. The studied ISs have multidisciplinary teams that include various specialists, such as "special educator and teacher's assistant", "special educator, social worker" "social educator, social worker, psychologist," and so on. Sometimes special educators carry out the same duties as social workers or psychologists. The same problem applies to the Tavush region, which does not have multidisciplinary teams. In particular, there is no established role for teacher's assistants and special educators. In fact, some schools employ special educators, psychologists and other teaching staff that have been reassigned as teacher's assistants against their will. Some of them, particularly those who have worked as social workers or psychologists, do the same job with less remuneration. Teacher's assistants often complain that there is no well-defined procedure to define the responsibilities they have to fulfill. In other cases, they carry out the same duties as social workers or psychologists but they lack the required professional qualifications. Moreover, in four out of the six studied ISs in Tavush region, the parents of children with SEN complained that due to the lack of specialists, their children do not receive sufficient individual learning support from the teaching staff. In other words, the economically desirable funding model hinders the provision of quality education for children with SEN.

The incoherence of multidisciplinary teams' functions is also present in other regions, where IS are financed through the typical funding model. For example, the functions of social worker and psychologist are often intertwined; psychologists often take on the role of social workers or teacher's assistants. Some schools even lack steady positions for psychologists and social workers. As the figure below shows, the majority of ISs require most speech therapists, psychologists and special educators. Moreover 13% of the teachers have highlighted their need for supplementary specialists, but don't clarify their professional qualities and skills. Once again, this illustrates the lack of knowledge about the composition and functions of the multidisciplinary team.



The next problem stems from weak collaboration between parents and the multidisciplinary team. In an attempt to conceal from the community the fact that their child has SEN, parents significantly reduce the viability and effectiveness of school efforts. For example, in one of the Vayk communities, a parent of a physically impaired child refused to bring the child to school, preferring home-based education. The parent is ashamed of carrying the child out of the house and refuses to use a wheelchair fearing people's negative attitudes. Influenced by their parents' behaviour, many children, especially those in middle and high schools, simply refuse to participate in special classes and activities, or even refuse to eat the food provided for children with SEN, in order to avoid being ridiculed by their classmates. This problem is particularly relevant to male students.

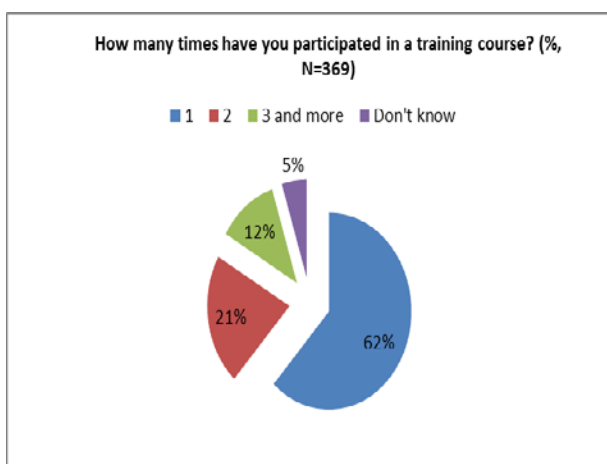
The tendency to hide children with SEN from the community in every possible way illustrates that parallel to implementing inclusive education, the schools should make significant efforts to reshape the community mentality and spread the idea of inclusiveness into the general environment. Particularly in rural communities, such a mentality and atmosphere are totally absent.

Survey results show that some subject teachers are prejudiced and have stereotypical attitudes towards children with SEN. It should be noted that there are two sides to this problem: 70% of the students claim that teachers treat children with SEN equal to the others, meanwhile interviews with multidisciplinary team members reveal that sometimes teachers perceive children with SEN as “incapable, unhealthy, not worth spending their time on as they cannot grasp the body of knowledge”. As a result, the entire load of responsibility falls on multidisciplinary teams. Also mainstream teachers have no motivation to spend extra time on children with SEN because: 1) they do not possess appropriate knowledge or skills in inclusive education because of lack of training; and 2) even when trained, these teachers believe, considering their meager pay, that they should not have to handle the educational problems of children with SEN, especially when there are specialized groups of professionals who are paid to do so.

A number of multidisciplinary team members state that subject teachers have repeatedly criticized the idea of having such teams, indicating that they could take on the team functions for additional remuneration. This clearly indicates that the main teaching staff lacks proper understanding of multidisciplinary team responsibilities and misperceives the latter as a costly and unnecessary position.

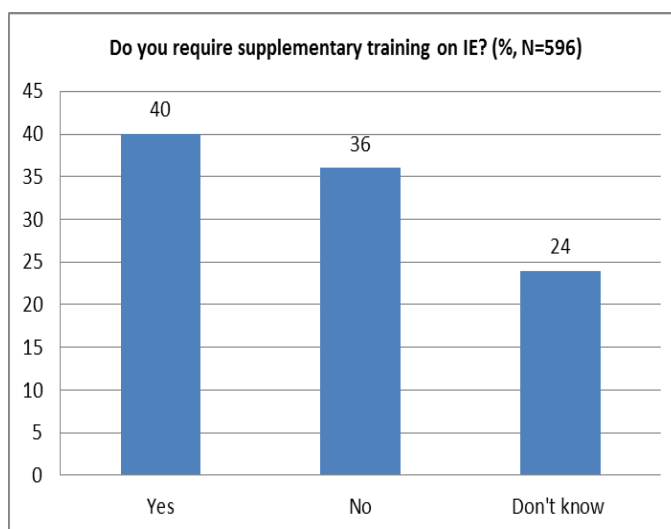
3.4 Teacher training and feedback mechanisms

The presence of **specialized personnel and teaching staff equipped with professional skills and knowledge** is one of the guarantees of quality education in ISs. It requires **regular training by corresponding specialized institutions**. According to Chapter 6, Point 1 of the Law on the Education of Persons with SEN, the agencies, institutions, state and non-governmental organizations providing education for children with SEN, and other interested individuals have the right to participate in the organization of international programs and projects on the education of persons with SEN, including the training of field specialists. On the state-level, general education teachers are trained by two main authorized structures: the National Institute of Education (NIE) and the MPPAC. Both institutions have their training modules designed and developed according to the study of best international practice and local expert experience from the State Pedagogical University.



As prescribed by law, before being granted the status of IS, the school must have its multidisciplinary team and teaching staff trained. 62.8% of teachers who participated in the study confirmed that they had had a training experience in inclusive education. An increase in participation was observed in 2012, when 29% of respondents were trained. Out of 369 teachers, 228 (61.8%) were trained only once. The list of training providers is also quite diverse. Since the majority of respondents have participated in training on IE only once, one may assume that they would remember the name of the organization that provided the training. In fact, 50.1% of trained teachers did not remember the name of the organization that conducted the training,

and 43.2% could not recall the topic of the training. Hence, either training organizations do not provide feedback mechanisms through which it is possible to assess training outcomes and knowledge application or the teachers are not really interested in the training and its outcomes. In the list of training providers, the NIE is the top training provider, with 30%, and is followed by Bridge of Hope NGO, with 9.5%. The list also includes local organizations (the MPPAC, Arabkir Medical Center, Asoghik NGO, Integration Center for the Hearing Impaired, Mkhitar Sebastatsi Educational Complex, Step by Step NGO), as well as other international donor organizations, such as World Vision Armenia, UNICEF, and Mission East. Although 40% of trained teachers confirmed their need of supplementary training, 35.8% of them had no idea which specific topic they need to be trained in. 19.6% of them preferred to participate in a general introductory course on inclusive education, and about 12% of respondents claimed that they would participate in any training course.



Of the 34 multidisciplinary team members involved in this study, 32 were trained. Based on their learning experience and attitudes, several improvements can be suggested.

1. *Increase practical knowledge:* According to respondents, NIE trainings were satisfactory only in earlier stages of IE, when integrated schools were just introduced and not many people knew about

- IE. Current training modules of the NIE consist mainly of theoretical and introductory materials, representing the core ideas of IE, its goals and objectives. However they lack in practical components. After the actual implementation of IE, many questions remain unanswered for teachers.
2. *Preparation of training profiles*: As multidisciplinary teams consist of various specialists, each member needs to acquire new knowledge and skills relevant to their specific professional functions and needs.
 3. *Increasing access to supplementary training*: The members of regional multidisciplinary teams have to commute to the capital for supplementary training, which is quite time-consuming. Creating regional resource centers would help to solve this problem.²⁴
 4. *Regularly updated training resource portal*: To increase the efficiency of the IE process, the official NIE website hosts an announcements section, which provides information about coming trainings. Some multidisciplinary team members are totally unaware that this website exists, whereas others complain about the lack of regular updates.
 5. *Strengthening feedback mechanisms*: The overwhelming majority of multidisciplinary team members are convinced that the public training institutions lack institutional feedback mechanisms. Because of this, it is impossible to monitor the extent to which knowledge is applied in practice, and make adjustments to the training modules. To solve the problems continuously arising in the administration of IE, only a small number of teachers and specialists apply through the school to training organizations for additional information. The majority prefer to handle these issues as they arise. In fact, there is a Q&A section (<http://www.aniedu.am/faq.html>) and an electronic inquiry form (<http://www.aniedu.am/polls.html>) on the NIE website, which allows school specialists to refer their questions to NIE staff. However all 34 surveyed multidisciplinary team members have claimed that they are not familiar with any of the mentioned feedback mechanisms.
 6. *Increased availability of IE materials*: The IE materials provided at trainings must be updated. Many teachers do not know where to go to acquire up-to-date literature on IE, since no thematic materials are available in the training section of the NIE website.
 7. *Increased frequency of trainings*: All members of the studied multidisciplinary teams have been trained only once by the NIE and MPPAC. They believe that the frequency of training courses is very limited and ineffective in terms of strengthening and enhancing the applicability of knowledge.
 8. *Needs assessment*: The lack of pre-training needs assessments is another shortcoming that results in a one-size-fits-all approach. During the first cycle of training, the general method of an introductory presentation is somewhat justified. However, an education needs assessment is the most effective method for increasing knowledge applicability and stimulating a consistent approach towards the training process.
 9. *Exchange of institutional best practice*: In order to develop their theoretical knowledge, the members of multidisciplinary teams have chosen to participate in an exchange of best practice with more advanced inclusive schools. The creation of leading ISs at the regional level would allow for more effective and frequent exchange of best practice.

When comparing the training courses conducted by the NIE and MPPAC, multidisciplinary team members are more satisfied with those of MPPAC due to their provision of a more targeted and applicable body of knowledge.

3.5 Special educational needs assessments and ICs

In Armenia, special education needs are assessed through the MPPAC. According to the survey results, both in the capital and in the regions, parents are misinformed about the essence and goals of the special education needs assessment (SENA) process. However while parents in Yerevan have some degree of information about the overall procedure of their child's SENA, those in the regions have no idea about the process. This does not mean that the assessment has not taken place at all. About half of the surveyed parents, 14 out of 34,

²⁴ It is noteworthy that the state strategy on introduction of overall inclusiveness and abolition of special schools may assume the need for another program, which will allow transforming the given institutions into resource centers.

do not understand SENA mechanisms because the schools and MPPAC specialists have not explained them. Parents mention that they have met some people from Yerevan and adjacent regions who have spoken with their children and shown them some colors, asked questions and in the end have concluded that the child is able to attend the school.

Sometimes, a needs assessment is mistaken for an assistance request. For example, in one of the studied cases, a parent was extremely disappointed with the fact that after the SENA, the child was not provided with a wheelchair and the parent had to solve the problem alone.

In cases when the parent has requested a SENA, there are two records of fundamental complaint. According to the director of the MPPAC, the child's educational needs assessment can take from one day to two weeks, depending on the level of case complexity and the need for supplementary specialists. Nevertheless, in the vast majority of studied cases, the SENA has lasted one or two days. Some parents believe that one or two days cannot reveal the accurate picture of the child's special education needs. They believe that process should require more time and specialists' frequent visits to schools, as it is likely that in their natural, familiar environment the children will behave in a more relaxed manner and will respond to the questions they were previously unable to answer.

Due to the limited number of MPPACs, the assessment sometimes occurs after the child has already begun attending the school. In one of the studied cases, a child was assessed a year after beginning to attend the school. Many parents say they want their children's educational needs to be assessed more frequently, for instance, once a year instead of once every two years.

In Yerevan, some parents claim that they are wary of the assessment methods used by MPPACs and consider them too primitive. Center specialists also admit that their methods need significant improvement. According to the director of the MPPAC, the team collaborates with UNICEF and a number of international experts to improve their SEN assessment tools. They also use international best practice and knowledge acquired through trainings in order to develop functional tools for assessing visual and mobile impairments in particular.

According to the Charter of the MPPAC, the center is responsible for the assessment of special education needs and not certification or referrals. Certification requires the conclusion of local government, as assigned by law. One of the principals noted that there were cases when these conclusions hindered children's access to the IE program. Nonetheless the overwhelming majority of parents still make the final decision to include the child in the IE program or not based on the conclusions of the MPPAC.

Concerning the practical design and implementation of ICs, principals and multidisciplinary team members state that ICs are designed according to law and assume the participation of a special educator, a social worker and teachers. Teachers have their own subject sections in the IC form, where they can mark the child's current condition, goals, action plan and progress. Multidisciplinary team members also note their comments on the IC.

According to our research, there are several controversial opinions and approaches between the multidisciplinary team members and IS principals about the development of ICs. As KII results revealed, a number of special educators complain about the limitations of the IC form. It does not allow for extensive note taking and expand the brackets to include not only the major subject notes, but also their corresponding sublevels. Another group of educators believes that the IC form is overloaded with a lot of unnecessary information and subsections, which distracts the teachers so that they do not have time to properly complete their assigned sections.

Designing ICs is red tape; although it allows to us work with the child, it is very time-consuming. Instead of spending days and nights on developing ICs, it's better to create a work plan with various subsections for the child. The time spent on IC can be used for working with children instead...

- Excerpt from personal interview with a special educator, Ijevan, Tavush

This conclusion emphasizes the importance of IC goals. For one group of principals and special educators, the goal of IC is, first and foremost, developing the child's capacity based on his/her actual needs. Meanwhile acquiring general knowledge is certainly not of paramount importance.

Most importantly, some students are interested in elementary mathematics, Armenian language, natural sciences. The child's abilities and interests should be taken into account provided he/she participates in the classes. Never mind if these children simply copy the Pythagorean theorem, it is essential to let them participate in the teaching-learning process.

- Excerpt from KII with a principal of an IS, Vayots Dzor

An opposite viewpoint is shared by small group of specialists, who believe that general/basic knowledge is the most important goal in achieving inclusive education. However the IC form has restricted space for subjects beyond math and Armenian language. Therefore its initial objectives cannot be fully achieved. In many cases, teachers do not even consider the “other subjects” section. Another issue that divides educators and administrators is the logic of IC development. One group of special educators fills in the IC guided by a *problem-centered* approach, while another group takes into consideration the child's *capacities and abilities*.

There is no common approach in terms of frequency of IC modification. ICs are revised and amended with a frequency varying from two weeks up to one year. According to and MoES representative, the ministry has not yet clarified this issue, as ICs should be reviewed every six months to one year. After the modification, based on the child's development and performance outcomes, the final achievements of the IC either change or remain the same if no progress is observed. One of the problematic issues is that none of the multidisciplinary team members has **identified the steps undertaken if the child has not made observable progress**. This illustrates that not enough attention is paid to the analysis of factors that may underlie the lack of progress and, accordingly, stimulate the changes in the methods and approaches.

In terms of the further development and improvement of ICs, principals and members of multidisciplinary teams and have come up with their comments and suggestions.

According to a group of special education teachers, differentiated ICs are much more efficient for the development of children with SEN as they consider their specific needs. For example, the IC of a child with psychological problems should differ from that of a physically impaired child.

One of the problems discussed by many of the principals is the incoherence actual development and the theoretical standards of development of children with SEN. As a result, ICs are often perceived as a formality. As the MoES education expert suggests, the problem could be solved only through the

introduction of competencies. This would also denote a shift from the Soviet legacy of academic education to a more applied system of education. Certainly, the overhaul of educational programs and curricula will require more than one or two years; it is a long-term process.

All the members of multidisciplinary teams involved in this study agree that the timeframes for IC design should be reconsidered and extended up to two or three months.

For example, if the child is assessed by MPPAC as having slight delays in mental development, his/her IC is designed according to the defined standards. But if the child is assessed as having learning difficulties, then we need time to understand and redefine our goals.

- Excerpt from KII with a special educator, Vayots Dzor

Another obstacle to IC planning is weak collaboration between the multidisciplinary teams and subject teachers. Quite often subject teachers do not pay enough attention to completing their corresponding subject sections in the ICs. They argue that the children with SEN should be managed by the multidisciplinary team members.

The problem with subject teachers is that they complete their subject sections in ICs with reluctance. They say it is the duty of other staff members, but over time this issue is being settled too. Subject teachers feel competitive towards the members of multidisciplinary team, as they believe that they could perform the team members' duties for additional remuneration.

- Excerpt from KII with a multidisciplinary team member, Yerevan

The biggest challenge in developing individualized learning paths is the lack of parents' participation in IC preparation and review. Moreover, the vast majority of parents of children with SEN do not have a clear understanding of IC and its goals. A number of parents have confirmed that they have signed certain documents given to them by the school without reading their contents. A few parents claim that they have not found the time to read them because of their tight schedule. However the majority argue that they have not been properly introduced to the purpose and meaning of IC. It is also worth noting that even with such a low level of awareness, many parents highlight the importance of ICs for their child's development.

I know nothing about an individualized education plan... but I approve of the process of individualized learning...

- Excerpt from KII with a parent of a child with SEN, Tavush

Principals and multidisciplinary team members have discussed parents' participation in the development and modification of ICs. Most principals realize and accept the importance of parents' active participation.

Principals confirm that the school conducts daily intensive work to involve parents in the child's learning development process. Multidisciplinary team members regularly pay home visits in order to work with the parents and help them keep track of the child's progress. Despite this fact, a passive approach and indifference among parents remains a major issue. It is highly incongruous that such indifference is mostly seen in parents whose children were actually left out of mainstream education before the schools gained their inclusive status. Given such an opportunity, one would expect the parents to be motivated to actively participate in their child's learning development process. However, in reality, this group of parents prioritizes only quick and visible change, without much involvement in the actual process.

Parents whose children were already attending school and were only assessed as having SEN after the school gained inclusive status often try to hide this fact, as they want to avoid negative attitudes and othering of their children.

...the child was under the guardianship of his grandmother, who was ashamed to come to school. She attended the general school meetings, but was ashamed to come and meet the experts.

- Excerpt from KII with a teacher's assistant, Tavush

Unlike IS principals, who recognize and admit to the aforementioned problem, multidisciplinary team members unanimously claim that ICs are developed and modified through the active participation of parents.

As has already been stated, ICs are developed by the multidisciplinary team, based on the the conclusion and protocol of the MPPAC assessment. Thus cooperation between the MPPAC and the IS is beneficial for the quality and effectiveness of IC development.

The majority of multidisciplinary team members consider the extent of MPPAC support to the development of ICs satisfactory. In the initial phase of IC design, specialists from the center explain the principles and criteria for IC development and provide the necessary methodological literature. As stated by the head of the MPPAC, the center's charter does not call for any further assistance to ISSs.

Although the members of multidisciplinary teams assess MPPAC support as satisfactory, the center's management is aware of existing problems. Both multidisciplinary teams and subject teachers are in need of continued support. Throughout the administration of inclusive education, teachers require professional advice and guidance, which is only possible through the establishment of regional resource centers. Currently the MPPAC cannot provide such support. According to the MPPAC director, multidisciplinary teams are trained only once, which is usually insufficient for effective work. Moreover, there are no established mechanisms for strengthening collaboration between subject teachers and multidisciplinary team members. Instead of helping teachers the latter take on the task of educating children. This issue has also been addressed by multidisciplinary team members who explain that this is the case because subject teachers are indifferent to their own duties.

Experts assume that it is possible to initiate legislative actions toward the establishment of additional assessment centers to strengthen the supporting function of the MPPAC. They point to the possibility of designating special schools as resource centers. If such an initiative is approved, the actual implementation will start only after the establishment of overall inclusiveness and the rearrangement of special schools as such.

So far, according to the draft amendment to the general education law, the jurisdiction of MPPACs is subject to expansion at school, regional and national levels.²⁵ When it comes to supporting regional MPPACs, their number should increase accordingly; there are currently only three centers.

Schools also lack IC monitoring mechanisms. Given the lack of parental involvement in IC development, it is obvious that they do not monitor the extent to which the educational process is in line with the IC. The modification of IC by the school could be considered as an option of continuous monitoring, provided it analyzed obstacles to the child's development and suggested corresponding solutions. In fact, IC modification simply records progress or the lack thereof. Meeting the objectives in a fixed timeframe raises the goal threshold; otherwise it remains static.

The MPPAC does not have any authority to monitor the implementation of IC, which according to the center's director, is the most significant problem in IE. The director says that many of the subject teachers do not know how to lower the threshold of knowledge in mainstream education so that the child with SEN gains skills matching his/her level of development. This issue should be tackled by experienced multidisciplinary team members, however due to the lack of cooperation between them and subject teachers, the problem remains unaddressed. It may be resolved if the “assessor” also take on the function of the “supporting and guiding” party.

3.6 Beneficiaries' perceptions of inclusive education

The IE concept is based on *tolerance* and other similar principles that are the prerequisites for drawing a clear line between two distant notions: *special conditions* and *differentiated treatment*. This study includes various beneficiaries' perceptions of IE and below, we present each separately. In contrast to IS principals and multidisciplinary team members, who are more or less aware of the essence and purpose of IE, perceptions in the parent community are cause for serious concern.

Parents: The parents of children without SEN can be clustered by their attitudes and perceptions into several groups. Several parents have absolutely no understanding of inclusive education. Moreover, they claim that it is the first time they have heard that their school is inclusive. This was especially prevalent in schools in the regions that have been granted the status of IS in the last two or three years. Parents state that they have not been informed or involved in any way in discussions and initiatives concerning granting the school inclusive status. Hence, IS administrators do not pay enough attention to preparatory activities with the parental community through which the parents learn the essence and objectives of inclusive education. The perceptions of their children toward IE are highly dependent on their own understanding. In Yerevan, parents have some degree of awareness about IE.

In contrast to the regions, the parents of children without SEN in Yerevan-based ISs are fairly informed about IE and its purpose, and have tolerant attitudes towards children with SEN. In parents' view, IE is associated with the ideas of “*help, support, integration, adaptation, remaining in education...*” and so on. When describing children with SEN, they use such expressions as: “*weak abilities*”, “*in need of support*” and “*like other children, but with little issues.*”

²⁵ http://www.edu.am/DownloadFile/4386arm-hanrajin_qnnarkum.pdf

I think it is right when children with SEN attend the school together with other children who do not have such issues; it helps them better adapt to the conditions than if they attended a special school.

- Excerpt from KII with an IS parent, Yerevan

Many parents in the capital indicate that they prioritize the necessity of creating conditions for special educational needs and inclusion of children with SEN in general education. Based on parents' experiences and observations, two possible scenarios of effective inclusion of children with SEN are presented below.

1. According to some parents, to avoid discrimination children with SEN should be included in education from a very early age. This group of parents believes that children with SEN who attend school at a later age, in middle or high school, inevitably are met with the negative attitude of their peers.
2. There is also an opposite belief that it is more difficult to explain to elementary school students why SEN children behave differently. Therefore it is highly likely that the SEN child would be subjected to ridicule and discrimination at an early age, which would inevitably affect the child's development.

From the point of view of security, it is also desirable to involve children with SEN in education at a later age.

We all know that children are sometimes aggressive; they can hit and hurt their peers. It can be a serious threat to little children.

- Excerpt from KII with an IS parent, Yerevan

Negative perceptions of IE are especially characteristic of parents of children in regional ISs. They associate IE with such expressions such as “*education of undeveloped, unhealthy children with defects*”, while the children with SEN are characterized as “*unhealthy, defective, infantile*”. There are two primary reasons underlying such negative perceptions: *fear and distrust of children with SEN*. According to some parents, children with SEN are often uncontrollable, especially in primary school. They believe their children are needlessly exposed to danger when “*these same children are unable to learn anything.*”

I was once present in the classroom ... there was a girl who was totally out of control. She was grabbing the pen from the teacher's hand, tearing the copybooks, hitting and spitting at other kids. My child had never had such an experience and was afraid to communicate with this child.

- Excerpt from KII with an IS parent, Gegharkunik

Inefficient organization of classroom learning: In the classroom children with SEN require extra attention and support. Many parents of children without SEN believe that because of this support, their children are not able to fully make use of the lesson, and, as they state, "... the process of classroom study fails, our children learn nothing." However, these same parent have not verified a decrease in their children's academic performance after sharing the classroom with SEN students.

It is worth mentioning that in Yerevan, the focus group discussions involved only those parents whose children studied together with SEN students, whereas the regional discussions involved parents whose children did not share classroom study with SEN students. Among the latter, negative attitude toward IE were especially pronounced.

Parents of children with SEN: If misinformation and stereotypical attitudes toward IE among the parents of children without SEN are due to the fact that they are not the direct beneficiaries of the IE program, the parents of children with SEN should be fully aware of and informed about inclusive education. However, as our findings illustrate, the level of awareness again differs in the capital and the regions. According to the 12 surveyed parents of children with SEN in Yerevan, inclusive education is for creating equal educational opportunities for their children and children without SEN, while taking into account the educational needs of children with SEN. The majority of these parents have independently collected information about the schools that have inclusive education programs. In some cases, the parents have transferred their children from one IS to another, reasoning that it is more suitable to their child's educational needs.

As for the regions, the 22 surveyed parents of children with SEN did not have a clear understanding of the goals and objectives of inclusive education and inclusive schools. The following types of opinions characterized this group of parents. Some parents of children with SEN believe that IE is for socially disadvantaged families who are not able to provide their child with food and travel expenses, and do not have time to properly monitor their child's learning process. Indeed, many parents from socially vulnerable families highlight the importance of nutrition for their children as its provision in a number of cases is the child's only daily meal, and is also consumed by other family members.

Some parents identify IE with individualized education and educational activity of narrow specialists with SEN children. Meanwhile the goal of individualized education is perceived as additional support to children with low academic performance in order to improve their grades and move on to the next class. According to the most common viewpoint, inclusive education allows children with limited opportunities to escape the monotonous home routine and spend some time in a different environment. Another important observation is that nearly all participant parents of children with SEN believe that inclusive education is **for rehabilitation and not for educational purpose**.

Chapter 4: Evaluating results of inclusive education: Follow-up mechanisms, achievements and sustainability

4.1 External and internal monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of inclusive education

The monitoring and evaluation plan is the most important tool for decision-making in project implementation. Based on established standards, it provides up-to-date information about project progress and outcomes, as well as recording the initial, current and final values of the specified standards. The retrieved information serves as a basis for ongoing improvements, project continuity and formulation of new targets.

The monitoring and evaluation system of the state education program is reflected in the 2011-2015 State Education Development Program. Chapter 8 of the Program designates the MoES as the responsible body for the implementation of monitoring and evaluation. Current monitoring data should be collected from the official reports of the National Statistical Service. The outcomes of educational inspection and investigation of license conditions will be considered as well. Where appropriate, a research study will be carried out including international and non-governmental organizations.

The development program also entails 21 indicators of the monitoring system, one of which relates to inclusive education, particularly the "number of schools in the inclusive education system." The program has a target of 90 ISs for an interim increase in 2010 (in 2013 this number was increased by 8), and the final target was marked with the value of 110. Therefore, in 2015 there will be 110 functioning ISs in the Republic of Armenia.

There is no state approved system of monitoring and evaluation in inclusive schools. In general education, the system is still being developed. UNICEF, the MoES and Bridge of Hope NGO have designed a localized system of indicators called "School is the Child's Friend", which has a section on the indicators measuring the implementation of inclusive education. In 2013-2014, the MoES is preparing to test this system in Nork-Marash district schools included in the program. After the test results are discussed and approved, the program will be introduced into the state system of monitoring and evaluation standards in mainstream inclusive schools.

Referring to the internal monitoring and evaluation of the studied inclusive schools, it should be noted that none of the 34 schools has a fixed system or plan for implementing the abovementioned processes. The principals are also unaware of the inclusion index; the majority perceive the ongoing monitoring of the implementation of inclusive education as IC modification, which defines the child's progress. The modification of ICs is one of the monitoring elements of the IE system. It reveals the child's progress and the corresponding outcome methods and efficiency of collaboration between the school and family. IC is a monitoring plan with its initial and final targets and actual steps. However the modification of IC cannot be currently considered as a monitoring tool, as long as its goals and working methods remain the same in case of no progress. Namely, it cannot serve as a basis for informed and evidence-based decision-making. For this reason, a number of IS principals perceive ICs as formality.

4.2 Integration of children with special needs into the school and community

As regulated by the law, children excluded from education should be handed to the Guardianship and Trustee Committee (GTC)²⁶ at the community level and to the Child Protection Units (CPU)²⁷ at regional level. The administration of schools in Yerevan and parents of children with SEN state that GTCs are passive in the field. In the regions, the cooperation between the school and the community is stronger. GTCs are not particularly active in these cases either, but when the Committee includes a principal, a teacher or a social worker, they can personally talk to the child's parents and urge them not to leave the child out of the education system. In fact, such a practice is very common. Parents of children with physical/locomotive impairments or delays in mental development are often hesitant to send them to school. In this case, the initiative comes from the community, typically represented by the school administration.

Collaboration with local polyclinics is a helpful way of identifying the children left out of the education system. The polyclinic informs the school about the medical and psychological condition of the child and the latter makes a decision on urging the parent to transfer the child into an IS. If children are already attending school,] but they have unique learning disabilities, it is the responsibility of teachers and administrators to identify them.

The parents' decision to take their children with SEN to school is not always perceived positively. Especially when the child has been initially left out of education, the community often pushes parents to "keep the child at home", "not to embarrass themselves", "to keep the poor child away from other spoiled children" and so on. Initially, teachers are also somewhat prejudiced about IE. A parent reported overhearing in the hallway how a teacher reproached a disorderly child, saying "if you misbehave you'll be sent upstairs and become one of the second floor students" (implying children with SEN, as the special resource room is located on the second floor of the school). Classmates display negative attitudes, particularly in the lower grades. For instance, according to one of the parents, the child was older than his first grade classmates and hence the children would ignore or laugh at him/her. The parent had to stay and follow the class to protect the child from bullying.

Two extremely unacceptable cases of stigmatizing children with SEN were registered in two secondary schools in Sevkar (Tavush) and Alaverdi (Lori). In first case, the parent accompanies the child to school

²⁶ GTC Charter, subsection of 2.b.

²⁷ CPU Charter, subsection 11.e

every day and waits in the hallway. Teachers also show negative attitudes as they believe that such children should be taken to special schools.

The former principal was a man, and the teachers would not dare to say out loud “take your child to a special school”, but now they have taken the liberty to say it.

- Excerpt from KII with a parent of a child with SEN, Tavush

Moreover, teachers have told this parent “to keep the child with her.” Although the child studies on the second floor, during breaks she does not communicate with other children. Instead she goes down to the first floor and stays with her parent until class starts. The child’s brother does not communicate in the classroom either. Therefore, the parent believes that if she had a choice, she would take both children to a special school.

In the case in Alaverdi, the parent says that her son has problems with vision and consistent headaches, but due to financial constraints, they have never been able see a doctor. The parent complains that the first grade teacher “Continuously hits my child with a ruler on the head and arms. The child does not want to go to school and complains that the teacher beats him, and doesn’t try to stop other children from destroying his copybooks. The teacher also humiliates the child in front of the classroom and says he has lice.” The child’s grandmother claims that the teacher has been negatively influenced by some parents, and the latter push the teacher to treat her grandchild poorly. This year’s teacher has a better attitude toward the child, but the parents’ and students’ perceptions of SEN have not changed.

This year, the child is seated in the first row, but still goes back to his former desk as the children bully him, not letting him sit in the front. They joggle and beat the child, throw his hat on the floor. Once I came to school in my house clothes because the child was ill and I had to leave the house immediately. The teacher offended me in public and said that I am no longer allowed to set foot in the school.

- Excerpt from KII with a parent of a child with SEN, Lori

Especially in the regions, the parents of children with SEN too easily take on the role of “adapting and all accepting culprit”. For example, in four out of six Tavush schools, the parents complain that their children are not paid enough individual attention neither by subject teachers nor by teacher's assistants. There are cases when children with SEN are not given homework or do not participate in classroom learning for months. However, their parents do not file any complaints to the school administration, stating that they empathize with the subject teachers as it is really difficult to keep track of their child for 45 minutes, and there are few teacher’s assistants to complete this task.

The most negative phenomenon that this research has revealed in a number of schools (and the parents of children with SEN unfortunately embrace this with enthusiasm) is the fact that for the sake of protecting children with SEN, teachers often emphasize in the classroom the SEN status of these children and urge other students without SEN to leave them in peace. This fact completely contradicts the idea of inclusiveness, but the parents believe that it is the only way to protect their children from harm.

Despite such negative attitudes, there are also positive changes in the overall perception of inclusiveness. Of the 34 surveyed parents of children with SEN, some confirm that the attitudes of teachers and other parents towards their child have become much more positive compared to when their child first entered the IS. The parents attribute this change to the passing of time and their patient attitude towards previous complaints and aggression.

Children with SEN are not distinguished at school. 62% of their classmates indicates that SEN children are usually passive and antisocial. Although their learning progress is satisfactory, children with SEN tend to stay away from conflicts and in case conflicts do arise, they call for their parent or special teacher.

Children with SEN do not have many friends. Parents note that their children are withdrawn and sullen, and they have only one or two friends at school. Some are visibly troubled by the fact that their children are unable to communicate with their peers. Others say that this way the children avoid unnecessary questions and problems.

In Yerevan, children with SEN are more actively involved in school events than in the regions, where their role in school events is either passive or very limited. Out of 34 schools only 10 organize so called “inclusive events” of which children with SEN and their parents are active participants. This is a clear violation of the principle of inclusiveness. It also illustrates the regular tendency to discriminate between the students during the educational process.

4.3 Achievements and sustainability

To assess the effectiveness of the implementation of inclusive education, we would like to present the major accomplishments and achievements which, according to the principals, teachers, special educators and parents of children with SEN, have been visible in the lives of children with SEN since they began attending inclusive school. These achievements form a logical chain, with one improvement leading to another. It should be noted that “it is important to have the child's presence in school” is no longer the main issue, and people involved in IE are now focused on the following developments:

- The majority of beneficiaries point out the changes in SEN children's behavior and learning outcomes as one of the achievements of IE. In most cases, these achievements are minor, such as correct pronunciation of words, ability to clearly recite poems, simple numeracy skills, and so on. However, for the parents of students with SEN, these are significant achievements, in comparison to the previous academic practice. Such small changes are very inspiring for the teaching staff, the parents and the child. There are even recorded cases of greater progress. For example, a 9th grade student with SEN got a state award in the school Olympiad, competing with a number of students from physics and math focused schools. These achievements are due to the devotion and professional work of multidisciplinary team members whose viability depends on the availability of additional training, methodological guidelines and the acquisition of modern didactic equipment.
- The second group of achievements consists of cases where children with SEN are admitted to mainstream programs after reassessment. Although such cases are rare, they illustrate the most effective final stage of work with children and owe their success to the productive partnership between the schools, communities and parents of children with SEN. Without the intense and consistent hard work of the latter, it would be impossible to achieve such high results. On the other hand, the success could also be attributed to effective collaboration between multidisciplinary team members and subject teachers. In schools with recorded achievements, the parents of children without SEN understand inclusion and do not discriminate against SEN children and their families. Classmates of children with SEN also demonstrate positive attitude and treat them just like everyone else.
- The third group of achievements was defined by IS principals. For them it is an obvious success that with such limited resources and lack of state support, they are able to ensure the implementation of

inclusive education in their schools. It is still too early to talk about quality assurance, as it requires significant investments in a physical, technical and professional-pedagogical resource base.

It is worth mentioning that IS principals, teaching staff, special educators and parents of children with SEN unanimously state that the professional future of SEN children beyond school remains uncertain. Even if the child has achievements, he/she can live a profound disappointment when realizing that the significant part of society today is not prepared to accommodate people with SEN. Families with SEN children do not even think about the future of their child and consider the mainstream school implementation of IE as the only available opportunity for children with SEN to integrate with peers and get the minimum basic knowledge.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Instead of inclusive education, there is a functioning model of integrated education in Armenia. Children with SEN are integrated into schools and get the same education as everybody else, but are differentiated by individualized curricula and dubbed with the derogatory label of the “inclusive kids”. Hence the concept of the quality of education is not present in any form in the IE system of Armenia.

Conclusion 2: The implementation of IE in Armenia lacks a comprehensive approach towards the professional team. This has a negative impact on the quality of IE.

Conclusion 3: The members of multidisciplinary teams do not have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Subject teachers are indifferent to IE and do not devote enough time to educating children with SEN.

Conclusion 4: Due to the lack of multidisciplinary teams in the pilot project in Tavush region, children with SEN are not receiving the quality or quantity of customized education that they need.

Conclusion 5: The collaboration between multidisciplinary teams, subject teachers and parents of children with SEN is very weak. Subject teachers do not trust multidisciplinary team members, and parents do not participate in IC design.

Conclusion 6: There are biased and stereotypical social attitudes towards children with SEN, which are often reinforced by the parents of children with SEN.

Conclusion 7: Regarding overall inclusiveness, the general growth dynamics of IS and their funding channels remain uncertain. These conditions are not favorable for the IE system, leaving it unprepared for the shift to universal inclusion.

Suggestions

General suggestions

Suggestion 1: The current model of Inclusive education should be revised to assure rather provision of quality education for all students than just join educating of children with and without SEN.

Suggestion 2: For realistic assessment of inclusion for all it is essential to determine the growth dynamics of IS and budgetary allocations by 2015. The option of increasing funding in the regions could be used to support more balanced growth.

Suggestion 3: In case decision is made to shift from experimental funding model of Tavush to typical funding, first and foremost it is required to conduct an in-depth case study of Tavush project in order to assess the quality - investment ratio.

Suggestion 4: Every initiation, innovative or pilot program related to Inclusive education should be developed in a transparent manner. The results should be presented and discussed with respective representatives from state, non-state and international organizations.

Specific suggestions

MoES

Suggestion 5: Clear definitions should be provided for the physical and technical criteria of inclusive schools.

Suggestion 6: State regulations on the structure and functions of multidisciplinary teams should be elaborated. The team should at minimum include a special educator, a social worker, a psychologist and a speech therapist. The structure and functions of the multidisciplinary team must be embedded in its Charter and be applicable to **all** inclusive schools.

MPPAC

Suggestion 7: It is necessary to decide on the most optimal and child-centered timeframe for special education needs assessments.

Suggestion 8: Continuous professional support to multidisciplinary teams and subject teachers should be embedded in the Charter of the MPPAC.

NIE

Suggestion 9: The number of trainings on inclusive education and related topics should be increased and special attention should be paid to practical knowledge and skills.

Suggestion 10: In the framework of inclusive education trainings, needs assessments and mandatory follow-up mechanisms should be further developed.

Suggestion 11: Materials and handbooks related to inclusive education should be made more accessible to teachers and specialists.

Local and international NGOs

Suggestion 12: Special emphasis should be placed on developing activities aimed at establishing tolerance among parents of children with and without SEN and teachers.

Suggestion 13: The administration of inclusive schools should ensure mandatory participation of parents of children with SEN in the development, monitoring and evaluation of their child's individualized curricula.