



# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ALBANIA



Save the Children





Inclusive education is one dimension of a rights-based quality education which emphasizes equity in access and participation, and responds positively to the individual learning needs and competencies of all children. Inclusive education is child-centered and places the responsibility of adaptation on the education system rather than the individual child. Together with other sectors and the wider community, it actively works to ensure that every child, irrespective of gender, language, ability, religion, nationality or other characteristics, is supported to meaningfully participate and learn alongside his/her peers, and develop to his/her full potential.

## Benefits of Inclusive Education

- Inclusive education support all children learn, everyone in the class benefits. Children learn at their own pace and style within a nurturing learning environment.
- In inclusive classrooms, children with and without disabilities are expected and supported to learn and progress
- Schools are important places for children to develop friendships and learn social skills. Children with and without disabilities learn with and from each other in inclusive classes. When children attend classes that reflect the similarities and differences of people in the real world, they learn to appreciate diversity. Respect and understanding grow when children of differing abilities and cultures play and learn together.
- All parents want their children to be accepted by their peers, have friends and lead “regular” lives. Inclusive settings can make this vision a reality for many children with disabilities.
- Inclusive Education affects positively the appreciation and diversity of communities where children live, and helps them to take active part in social and cultural life of the communities in which they live.

**Inclusive Education ensures support so that all children learn together regardless of their individual needs.**

## An overview of Inclusive Education in Albania and the role of Save the Children

Commitment for fighting and protecting the rights of children with disabilities has been one of main initiatives and missions of “**Save the Children**” organisation since 1919. Ever since, Save the Children has continued contributing vigorously to the protection of the rights of children with disabilities. Nearly a century afterwards, Save the Children has developed approaches which have affected essentially educational and social policy reforms based on the rights of children with disabilities.

The “**Inclusive Education**” programme was quite an ambitious, visionary initiative, which was based on an appreciation attitude towards disability as a human/children’s rights issue, with a clear aim of implementing a reforming process of policies, culture and existing practices. Confronting with the educational reality of children with disabilities, considering special schools as the best alternative for their schooling, the prevalent culture of non-acceptance of these children in kindergartens, schools, etc., were a few of the obstacles to this challenging task .



Moreover, **low inclusion of children with disabilities in education**, was not only the outcome of the legal and institutional gaps, discriminating climate, the mindset of parents concealing children's difficulties, but also of the confusion regarding education terms, such as **"integrated"** and **"inclusive"**. The concept of "inclusive" as the alternative to creating the proper conditions for developing disabled children's potentials, was little or at all known among educational professionals, parents and students, especially where inclusion was piloted initially.

Since the launching of this programme, "Save the Children" has supported **early identification of children with disabilities**, applying the **"Portage"** method. Primary education teachers trained for applying this method paid home visits to children with disabilities, in order to prepare them come confidently to the Pre-school and school settings. Teachers who have worked with children with disability and other education professionals have applied methods and practices, which have facilitated and accelerated the integration and inclusion process of children with disabilities in kindergartens and basic education schools.

Following the setting up of a **multidisciplinary team** based at the Education Directorate under the frame of a **cross-institutional agreement**, the identification of children with special educational needs and assessment of their needs was transferred under the authority of this structure, and it aims at the treatment of disability through a **biopsychosocial** approach. Following his/her enrolment at the kindergarten or school, according to the instructions of the Multidisciplinary Commission, the child is under the special care and attention of the evaluation group within the school, which, based on the team's recommendations at a Regional Education Directorate level, works on the draft of **Individual Plans (IP)** and the creation of favourable conditions in order to facilitate quality education for these children.



**Save the Children has provided and still does provide successful models regarding identification of children with disabilities, such as development and piloting of a database, coordination with civil society, municipalities, primary health centres and parents aiming at early identification and enrolment of these children at school.**

Save the Children and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MES), since 2004, have closely cooperated on the implementation of Inclusive Education for children with disabilities. Owing to the long experience in the **implementation of Inclusive Education** models, a considerable number of children with disabilities have been supported during the enrolment and full participation process, during the process of improvement of academic performance and socialisation with other classmates within the environment of the public school.

**The drafting of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, approved in 2004 and the Education Strategy of the Ministry of Education and Sports, marked the first important and favouring steps forward in the inclusion process of Albanian education.**

The implementation of Save the Children programme for inclusive education has brought about **important changes**, especially in the development of the practical inclusive teaching models and practices, culture and mindset in schools and communities and encouragement of legal amendments and draft of inclusive policies for the pre-university education system and cross-sectorial coordination, through setting up of supporting structures at local level which facilitate direct work with disabled children.

**Save the Children during implementation of programmes and projects in the field of inclusive education has worked in order to build capacities of in-service teachers, supply school with didactic means, and has issued a series of research studies for the situation of children with disabilities; has enhanced school infrastructure, as well as provided support for universities regarding curricula reviews.**

**UN Convention for Persons with Disabilities** entered into force on **3 May 2008** being ratified by 20 states. This Convention is regarded by the United Nations as the most important treaty on the human rights of the XXI century which addresses the social, political, economic and cultural rights. **The Convention supports and complements vigorously the Convention of Children's Rights.** It emphasizes that the barriers to fully enjoying life do not stand on the limitations of the disability itself, rather on the physical, social and cultural attitudes that these persons face on their daily life, including children. The Convention pointed out to governments' obligations towards children with disabilities and provided measuring mechanisms and instruments for the application of these principles.

The commitment of the Albanian government regarding its ratification on **22 December 2012** asserted and testified the urgent need of immediate actions in supporting the inclusive processes of the basic principles such as respect, social equality, fighting against institutional and social discrimination. The willingness of the Albanian government and especially of the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth thanks to joint efforts with non-governmental organisations have paved the way for equal education opportunities to children with disabilities.

**Cooperation experience over several years of Save the Children with the Ministry of Education and Sports in promotion and support of inclusive education has resulted effective and helpful in improving the policymaking process and the legal framework with respect to the education issues of children with disabilities. One of the crucial achievements in the respect of policy drafting is the preparation of the draft-law on pre-university education (approved on 13 July, 2012). Save the Children was engaged in the formulation of several key components of this legislation, which foresees facilitations for Inclusive Education of children with disabilities nationwide.**

## **An overview of Inclusive Education Programmes by Save the Children, during 2000 and on**

**Placing Inclusive Education as a top priority of Save the Children for the strategic period 2009-2012, demonstrated once more decidedness, continuity and stability of projects about inclusion, regarding it as an urgent need of the Albanian schools and society.**



The Project "Integrated Special Education" started to be implemented in Albanian in **2000-2003** in the regions of **Tirana and Elbasan (Tirana, Elbasan, Librazhd, Peqin)** aiming at early identification and direct support of children with disabilities. Since 2000 **Save the Children has been setting up multidisciplinary teams and carries out early identification and provides direct support** to children with disabilities and learning difficulties.

In **2006-2008** Save the Children set on the implementation of the programme "Inclusive Education" based on the **Inclusion Index** in the regions of Tirana, Berat and Librazhd, to be extended in **2008** in the region of Korça, and then to Vlora and Gjirokastra, aiming at inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools and kindergartens, bringing about the inclusion of 140 children with disabilities to schools in **2006**, as well as 123 children with disabilities to schools and 83 children in kindergartens during **2007**.

Starting in the years **2008 – 2012**, the piloting of the multidisciplinary teams for the evaluation of children with disabilities at the Regional Educational Directorates of Gjirokastra dhe Vlora was implemented, and since 2013 with the building of capacities of the multidisciplinary Commission in Regional Educational Directorates of Durrës, Elbasan, Korça, Gjirokastra, Vlora, Peshkopia and Education Office of Burrel, and providing help to support teachers for the period **2008– 2012** in pilot schools of Korça, Vlora and Gjirokastra.

**As a result of the work and activities of the project “Inclusive Education for children with disabilities in the preschool and 9-year school system” implemented in 2009 in Vlora, Korça, Gjirokastra and Berat, 132 children with disabilities had been enrolled in schools and kindergartens part of the project, whereas 365 other children have been supported with Individual Education Plans, which had been drafted in cooperation with teachers, parents and children, on the basis and needs of the children’s potentials.**

One of the best practices regarding the strategy implementation 2009-2012 **was the set up and strengthening of the multidisciplinary teams to which representatives of institutions working directly with children and children with disabilities have participates.** In order to materialise this cooperation network under the frame of the Inclusive Education Project since 2011, their setting up and consolidation of two teams at the Educational Directorates of the cities of Korça and Vlora was made possible, in order to support the inclusion process of children in kindergartens and schools. In 2012 this team was set up and piloted even at Gjirokstra region. Based on the piloted and implemented models by Save the Children, the multidisciplinary teams have been always set up by MES in all region of Albania.

During the strategic period of 2012 – 2015, **Save the Children has provided multiple trainings which have aimed at professional, pedagogical and legal capacity building of specialists at EDI; IKAP (National Pre-University Education Inspectorate); and Regional Education Directorates in Durrës; Elbasan; Korça; Gjirokastra; Vlora; Peshkopi and Education Office of Burrel; concerning the evaluation of educational needs of children with disabilities and learning difficulties and the inclusive practices in the classroom and at school.**

**Save the Children since 2013 has increased the number of beneficiaries for the regions of Durrës, Elbasan, Burrel and Peshkopi, as well. “Inclusive Education” Programme enlarges its dimension aiming at reaching their full intellectual and physical potential and improvement of life quality of children with disabilities, in order to prepare them for complete integration into society and the job market.**

The project **“Inclusive Education for children with special educational needs in Albania”** was implemented in partnership with Medpak Association and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education during **2014-2017** in 7 Albania regions, including urban and rural areas of Peshkopia, Burreli, Durrësi, Elbasan, Vlora, Korça and Gjirokastra. A holistic approach has been introduced and has been implemented in 14 schools and 14 kindergartens, setting up early identifying and supporting mechanisms for children with disabilities and learning difficulties. A **database** was established to facilitate this mechanism the identification and follow up the progress of children with disabilities and learning difficulties. Educational institutions, the Ministry of Education and Sports, as well as the Regional Education Directorates are benefiting from the use of the database.

During project implementation, **577** teachers have enhanced their skills for applying inclusive methodology and didactics. As a result of the continuous advocacy and cooperation with regional authorities, Save the Children has managed to include and train **132** support teachers in schools and kindergartens at 7 regions, where the project is being implemented. These teachers will support individual educational needs of children with disabilities and learning difficulties. Direct beneficiaries of this project were **401** children with disabilities and learning difficulties. Following the 100 per cent support provided by the project, children, following the assessment of the Regional Multidisciplinary Commissions, were regarded as in need of being treated with an individual education plan, and hence were supported by such a plan.





A new package of Individual Education Plan was drafted in compliance with the international standards of inclusive pedagogy will come to the help of all pre-university education teachers, in order to guarantee development and progress of children with disabilities in schools and kindergarten. 7 Multidisciplinary Assessment Commissions set up at the respective Regional Education Directorates as a result of the intervention were supported for capacity building in educational needs identification of children with disabilities, according to the methodology of International Classification of Functioning. Assessment instruments of children suffering from neurodevelopmental problems aged 5-10 years, were developed in order to help commissions assess neurodevelopmental problems of children in line with the global diagnostic manuals.

Equipping educational institutions and kindergartens with **didactic means and enhancement of infrastructure** ensured access and quality of education to children with disabilities. Schools in 7 regions of the project were granted funds for implementing minor projects targeting the quality improvement of the school in compliance with the inclusion index. Activities and awareness-raising campaigns where **7000 children and 4700 parents** participated were various, and all aimed at raising the awareness of every child's rights to education, including those with disabilities. Among the most successful project cooperation we could distinguish that with the Universities of Korça and Elbasan which based on the expertise provided from Bologna University managed to review all programmes and curricula of the Department of Education.

The Departments will continue working on the development of new programmes in line with the principles of Inclusive Education whose main aim is support of children with special needs. Owing to this cooperation the Universities of Korça and Elbasan designed a **Master Teaching Programme on the minor profile of the support teacher**. All these inclusive interventions were implemented thanks to the financing from the Italian Development Cooperation Agency.

Save the Children has continued the interventions in Inclusive Education which is focused on early childhood/pre-school and basic education, aged 0-15 years that will be follow during 2016 -2019. These interventions are being implemented in Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan, Mat, Klos, Gjirokastra and Fieri regions in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Sports and civil society organisations, such as IPSED, Roma Active Albania, Voice of Roma and Romano Sezi. The interventions are supported by Save the Children Italy, Bulgaria, REF and Medicor. They aim to ensure inclusion of vulnerable children, children with disabilities, Roma, Egyptians and children living in poor economic and social conditions, thus guaranteeing access, education and quality services since early childhood.

The projects will make use of **effective** approaches and practices used in earlier interventions hence intensifying the support of local structures, in order to become an active part, to establish and improve services which will ensure continuity and stability in supporting children and families in need and guarantee holistic development of their potentials.

During this period Save the Children jointly with the Institution of Education Development is piloting **“School as a Community Centre”** approach. This approach will create possibilities and spaces for establishing an inclusive climate, respect for diversity, safety and social/emotional welfare of all children, through significant participation and cooperation between school, family and community.

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