

MAPPING POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR THE PREPARATION OF TEACHERS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN CONTEXTS OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

ALBANIA COUNTRY REPORT

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FOREWORD

This report is the outcome of the ETF regional project *promoting inclusive education and training policies and practices in contexts of social and cultural diversity in the Western Balkans and Turkey*. In 2009, the European Training Foundation (ETF) commissioned a study resulting in 7 country reports¹ *Mapping Policies and Practices for the Preparation of Teachers for Inclusive Education in Contexts of Social and Cultural Diversity* with the overall aim to contribute to the promotion of inclusive education and training policies and practices in Western Balkan countries. The study has been set within a wider framework of other studies, research and policies already carried out by national and international organisations. Furthermore in the diverse social and cultural contexts of the Western Balkan countries the studies link the challenge of inclusive education to the broader challenges of social inclusion and social cohesion, which are high on the EU agenda.

The study was designed to explore various perspectives of the relevant actors, and relies on qualitative data collected through documents analysis, interviews and focus groups, as well as information collected in an on-line survey. It was conceptualised to be carried out in two phases. The first phase finalised by the end of December 2009, mapped policies and practices in teacher preparation in each of the countries under study. The primary focus of the study was teacher education in contexts of social and cultural diversity. While a number of studies have addressed on the one hand social inclusion in education and training where focus is placed on i) access, attainment and progression and ii) teacher preparation, still we can say that so far little research has been conducted in the region to look at teacher preparation for development of transversal competences for social inclusion. Therefore, the completed country reports bring additional value to the already existing research and data on policies and practices for teacher education in the countries under study. Moreover, much of the benefit of this research is through the process of carrying it out with local research teams, who through their research, have opened up the relevant issues in the countries as part of an on-going policy dialogue at all levels of the education system on the topic.

The first phase included the drafting of a common thematic outline used as a basis for country reports that provided relevant qualitative information as well as basic qualitative analyses. These country reports constitute the main preparatory work and stock-taking exercise for regional level analysis. In order to analyse the relevant aspects of the regional context and how to enhance and support the processes at country and regional level, a second phase of the research is agreed for the period 2010. This will lead to a cross country report which will analyse and synthesise the findings of the 7 country reports into a regional map of policies and practices. The cross country report aims to critically analyse and synthesise the policies and practices in teacher preparation for inclusive education in contexts of social and cultural diversity in Western Balkans.

A consortium company, SCIENTER and Centre for Education Policy (CEP) has been contracted to work with the ETF on the country and cross country reports. The ETF selected research team from SCIENTER/CEP have been working very closely with the ETF-supported Balkan Regional Policy Network during the research phase. The draft country reports have been reviewed by the ETF social inclusion team (Dagmar Ouzoun, Elena Pompilio, Evgenia Petkova, Henrik Faudel, Keith Holmes and Lida Kita) and been widely discussed and received feedback from the Western Balkans and Turkey key stakeholders during the 2009 ETF organised regional events.

We thank everybody involved for their contributions, support and commitment to cooperation in preparation of the country report.

¹ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo (defined by UNSCR 1244), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
DPO	Disabled People's Organisation
DG EAC	Directorate General for Education and Culture
DG EMPL	Directorate General for Employment
EC	European Commission
EFA/FTI	Education For All/Fast-track Initiative
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EURAC	European Academy Bozen/Bolzano
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoA	Government of Albania
ICT	Institute of Curricula and Training
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IEP	Individual Educational Plan
ILO/IPEC	International Labour Organisation/International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
REF	Roma Education Fund
SAA (EU)	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SCiA	Save the Children in Albania
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SEN	Special Educational Needs
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WB	World Bank

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was conducted within the European Training Foundation (ETF) regional project on social inclusion through education and training in South Eastern Europe. The present report maps policies and practices for the preparation of teachers for inclusive education in Albania in order to analyse the initial training and in-service professional development available to teachers. The study is designed to explore various perspectives of the relevant actors and is built on qualitative data collected through interviews and focus groups, the analysis of documents and information collected in an on-line survey.

The study finds that current strategies for educational reform within Albania aim at decentralising governance of pre-university education by increasing the autonomy of schools, while at the same time improving the quality of teaching and learning through: development of quality assurance instruments and a National Curriculum Framework; provision for teacher development; and addressing issues of funding and Vocational Education and Training (VET).

The National Strategy for Children is supposed to ensure equal access to quality education for all, but monitoring of strategy implementation has revealed gaps in the development of inclusive education alternatives for marginalised children, including children with disabilities. This is currently being addressed by renewed efforts to harmonise policies ranging from strategies on inclusive education for children and the education of students with disabilities in mainstream schools.

This report finds the acquisition of competences for inclusive education in student teacher training and in-service courses for working teachers is significantly hindered by structural barriers in the wider teacher training system. Teacher training in general is plagued by low standards at the admissions level, which in turn contribute to a loss of social status and the poor remuneration that afflicts the teaching profession as a whole; elements that translate into low motivation for teacher-driven reform.

The pre-service teacher education system is still primarily subject-based, with a structure that precludes the specific teaching of skills and competences for inclusion. That said, the system is progressing towards a form of curriculum preparation and delivery which incorporates some subject social inclusion components and the recognition of pupil diversity. The principal finding of the study is evidence of the difference in attitudes towards inclusion between teachers who studied under the 'old' system and those who have followed the newer programmes subject to these policies.

In-service education has made a relatively minor contribution toward the acquisition of competences on inclusion, due to the fact that teacher in-service training programmes are neither compulsory nor accredited. Training provision is largely and disproportionately delivered by the non-governmental sector and thus lacks cohesion and coordination. It does not operate within a career progression framework offering tangible benefits for the teachers it trains. Hence, it is too early to talk about in-service education as a significant contributor to overall inclusion within education as the current system requires a thorough overhaul.

Interviews with parents and community members confirm findings that teachers are generally provided with insufficient knowledge and preparation to handle diversity in the classroom (particularly in terms of children with special educational needs) albeit through no fault of their own.

Nonetheless, the research team found that good practices exist and are identified by both schools and parents, although little or no research has been undertaken so far to document teacher skills and how practitioners cope with the diversity of children in regular mainstream classrooms.

The study indicates that inclusive education in Albania requires a paradigm shift to influence the system at all levels. The Albanian teachers at the core of the system are still far from the 'activism' promoted by Sachs (2003) and Barton (2003); lacking support and motivation as much as appropriate preparation. Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) officials and university staff could use the questions raised on how the teacher education curriculum can encourage the development of inclusive education by Booth et al (2003) to provide a clear foundation on which to build strategies for implementation of the intended reform.

The authors propose a number of measures for action by system-level decision makers, teacher trainers and teachers to accelerate inclusion policy reform based on the evidence acquired during this research.

Mapping Policies and Practices for the Preparation of Teachers for Inclusive Education in Contexts of Social and Cultural Diversity

COUNTRY REPORT FOR ALBANIA

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Objectives and Context

1.1.1 Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of this study on *Mapping Policies and Practices for the Preparation of Teachers for Inclusive Education in Contexts of Social and Cultural Diversity*, commissioned by the European Training Foundation, is to contribute to the promotion of inclusive education and training policies and practices in contexts of social and cultural diversity in the Western Balkans. The study is organised in two phases: a first phase which considers the national situation in each of the countries covered; and a second phase synthesising the reports into a regional map of policies and practices.

This report falls into the first research phase and the specific objectives are: (1) to analyse policies and practices on initial teacher training and in-service professional development schemes at the country level, and (2) to identify issues, challenges and good practices in the seven participant countries² with regard to the skills and competences needed for primary and secondary teachers to implement inclusive education practices.

The primary focus of the study is teacher preparation in the context of social and cultural diversity. A number of studies have already addressed social inclusion in education and training where the focus is placed on access, attainment and progression and others have approached the issue of teacher training, but thus far, there has been little research in the region to combine the two themes under the single issue of ‘teacher training for development of competences for social inclusion.’ Therefore, this study provides added value to existing research and data on social inclusion and teacher education in the countries under study. Moreover, great benefits have come from the local research process, opening up discussion of relevant issues in the countries as part of an on-going policy dialogue at all levels of the education system. This study has been set within a wider framework of studies, research and policies already carried out as described in Chapter 2 of the report. This report has been designed as mapping exercises to collect initial information on relevant issues in the Western Balkans and to evaluate that data against the most recent international research in the area.

² Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

Furthermore, the studies link the challenge of inclusive education to the broader challenges of social inclusion and social cohesion in the diverse social and cultural contexts of the Western Balkan countries; an issue high on the European Union (EU) agenda. This report points to potential new fields for more in-depth research on teacher education and social inclusion.

1.1.2 Context of the Study

The ETF is an EU Agency³ and promotes the values and objectives of the EU. The work of the ETF is particularly based on the premise that vocational education and training makes a fundamental contribution to competitiveness, employability and mobility in modern economies. The ETF mission is to help transition and developing countries harness the potential of their human capital through reforms in the education, training and labour market systems in line with EU external relations policy. The ETF provides advice and assistance to the European Commission (EC) and a number of partner countries⁴ receiving support from EU external relations programmes for the modernisation of human capital development policies.

In 2007, the EU introduced new external assistance instruments that aimed to establish clearer relationships between the EU and partner countries (EC, 2004). Candidate and potential candidate countries can move progressively towards accession with support from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) (EC, 2006).

ETF efforts to prioritise human resources provide many benefits as they: help provide a better living for individuals and families; reduce illiteracy, poverty and crime in partner countries; and encourage more stable relations between the EU and its neighbours. The outcome is reduced pressure for migration, more opportunities for trade, safer jobs in Europe, and, in short: prosperity and stability for both EU Member States and their neighbours.

Work on human capital development offers a solid foundation for the improvement of living conditions, strengthening of democracy and active citizen participation, encouraging respect for human rights and cultural diversity.

In addition, the ETF emphasises the lifelong learning aspect of education and training, especially bearing in mind the economic and political transition processes in partner countries and the need to expand capacities for learning and facilitate recognition of non-formal learning.

The ETF recast regulation adopted in December 2008⁵ stating that it will work through EU foreign policy to improve vocational education and training systems in order to develop human capital, in terms defined as work that contributes to the lifelong development of the skills and competences of individuals. In response to this new mandate, the ETF prepared a new Mid-Term Perspective (MTP) 2010-13 setting the key perspectives for the work programme. The ETF is particularly focused on cooperation for gender equality and equity, lifelong guidance, sustainable development and social inclusion with partner countries. Equitable, inclusive and sustainable systems and responses to human capital challenges provide positive indicators for human

³ The ETF was established by Council Regulation No. 1360 in 1990 (recast No. 1339 in 2008) to contribute to the development of the education and training systems of the EU partner countries.

⁴ ETF works with the following partner countries: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244), Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Russia, Serbia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan

⁵ Regulation (EC) No 1339/2008 of 16 December 2008

development and also have long-term benefits for society. They promote economic and social development and thus contribute to competitiveness and well-being.

The concept of wider European cooperation in education and training was launched at the 2002 Barcelona Council and the Commission Communication on an updated strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training (European Commission, 2008a) strengthened the process by focusing on four strategic challenges⁶ for the 2010-20 period. The Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)⁷ state that, 'European cooperation in education and training for the period up to 2020 should be established in the context of a strategic framework spanning education and training systems as a whole in a lifelong learning perspective.' In reaching the objectives set within the strategic framework, particular attention is given to ensuring high quality teaching through adequate initial teacher education and continuous professional development for teachers and trainers.

While fully respecting the responsibility of Member States for their own educational systems, the strategic framework recognised that open coordination should draw on 'evidence and data from all relevant European agencies'. The ETF role in supporting enhanced mutual learning, transfer of innovation and policy development in the field of education and training in third countries is also mentioned.

Thus, ETF work on human capital development is guided by a number of international standard-setting documents, including the *Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* and the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. Also, in view of the ongoing European integration process of some of the partner countries and territories (the so-called IPA group⁸), it must be stressed that human rights principles, including respect for and protection of minorities, are an integral part of the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession. This means that the Western Balkan countries are also required to comply with the EU legislative *acquis*⁹ in the field of anti-discrimination and equal opportunities.

The Western Balkan countries have already ratified the main international conventions on human and minority rights and are in the process of adopting the *acquis*. The education ministers of the South Eastern Europe region signed a joint statement making a commitment to the area of human capital development in South Eastern Europe as a long-term investment at the Informal Conference of European Ministers of Education in Oslo on 5-6 June 2008. This statement expresses a commitment to promote: quality, diversity and equitable access to education; innovatory capacity within education systems; and intercultural capacities of educational institutions as key prerequisites to the prosperity and sustainable development of the Western Balkan countries and their integration to the EU. The ministers stated their intention to promote intercultural dialogue and cooperation at local, regional, national and international levels to foster environments conducive to creativity and innovation, *inter alia* by encouraging cooperation between the areas of education, higher education and research (Minister of Education from Southern Europe, 2008).

However, appropriate legislation alone cannot overcome the obstacles to social inclusion and integration as structural and institutional barriers also need to be addressed. A number of specific poverty reduction

⁶ Make lifelong learning and learner mobility a reality; improve the quality and efficiency of provision and outcomes; promote equity and active citizenship; enhance innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship at all levels of education and training.

⁷ www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf (page accessed 17th December 2009)

⁸ These are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

⁹ The Community *acquis* is the body of common rights and obligations which bind all the Member States together within the European Union. It comprises the Community law as well as the common objectives laid down in EU Treaties. Applicant countries have to accept the Community *acquis* before they can join the Union.

strategies have been adopted with support from international donors and intergovernmental organisations in a number of Western Balkan countries and these have started a trend in the right direction. A number of countries have also adopted specific education reform strategies in acknowledgement of the role of education and training in ensuring sustainable growth and social inclusion. These focus on inclusion in education in terms of access, participation, retention, completion and quality of learning outcomes to varying extents.

1.1.3 Education Reforms and the Role of Teachers in Inclusive Education

System reform on inclusive education is moving from the system level downwards in the countries covered by this study. Legislation and strategies are in place in most of the countries and in many cases implementation mechanisms such as new curricula are being developed and adopted for pre-school, primary and secondary education. The focus of attention is gradually being shifted onto what actually happens in classroom interaction between pupils and teachers. This places the emphasis firmly upon the disposition, skills, knowledge and motivation of teachers in adopting new approaches to the education of children from various socio-economic, cultural and experiential backgrounds. It is their input that is paramount in ensuring any real changes in practice, and hence impacts on the outcomes of learning. In the Western Balkans, however, research into teacher acquisition of the competences required to deliver inclusive education is at an embryonic stage.

One study of teacher competences (Pantić, 2008) reported teachers in BiH, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Serbia covered in the present research placed greatest importance on competences relating to equality, supporting the learning of all pupils and the promotion cultural diversity in the broadest sense. However, deeper understanding is needed of how the formulation of relevant competences actually translates into daily teaching practices and how present and future teachers can best be helped to develop those competences that best ensure and promote an inclusive society and education.

The ETF has therefore made a commitment to support the Western Balkan countries (2007-2011), placing emphasis on how education and training can reduce social exclusion in culturally heterogeneous societies and facilitating the development and implementation of long-term sustainable strategic policy approaches.

One of the first outcomes of this commitment was the *Social Inclusion of Ethnic Groups through Education and Training: Elements of Good Practices*, document commissioned by the ETF in 2007. Relevant areas for policy development were highlighted and several recommendations on designing and implementing inclusive education and training policies and measures in the Western Balkan countries were provided. The findings of the study were also discussed by national authorities and experts from Western Balkan countries, leading to the identification of challenges and to the drafting of related policy notes in some countries. Furthermore, an expert group was established for the Western Balkans, consisting of stakeholders from the region (a mixed profile of academics, policy makers and practitioners from public institutions or NGOs), representatives of international organisations active in the region and the EC Directorate General for Enlargement, Directorate General for Education and Culture and Directorate General for Employment). The work of this group is supported by the ETF.

Finally, in the concluding statements of the ETF conference in November 2008, participants from IPA countries and territories stressed the need for greater emphasis on intercultural or inclusive education and training in the broader sense, and especially on the role and competences of teachers in this context. This perspective was primarily prompted by the conclusion in both pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development in the Western Balkan countries that schools are widely assumed to be mono-ethnic institutions with homogeneous class compositions. Teachers are generally ill prepared to work with children and parents

from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. There is a need for increased teacher competence in recognising, accommodating and valuing diversity in the classroom and wider society and there must be enhanced teacher competence to overcome discrimination, exclusion and disadvantage in education.

Activities aimed at initial teacher training reform are additionally motivated and marked by the Bologna Process. This serves as an overarching framework for re-thinking the duration, content and organisation of teacher education study programmes for pre-primary, lower primary, upper primary and secondary education levels. In a number of countries, discussion of the university 3+2 or 4+1 dilemma¹⁰ has inspired heated debate on the objectives and learning outcomes of particular teacher education programmes. Debate has also been provoked on the amount, type and delivery of didactic, methodological and pedagogical input for teachers, especially those training to teach specific subjects. However, there is currently no appropriate research evidence available to inform such change and provide insight on exactly how the new competences required by the teaching profession could best be developed in the current context.

Studies on existing teacher training in the region (Pantić, 2008; Rajković and Radunović, 2007; Zgaga 2006) invariably show present provision concentrates on theoretical and subject related knowledge and skills with little hands-on experience of teaching in real-life classrooms. In fact, some courses involve no classroom experience at all and provide no opportunities for the teacher to increase their capacity to deal with a number of out-of-school factors relevant to inclusive education such as parental and community involvement. This factor alone represents one of the major challenges to teacher preparation for inclusive education and training practices. One of the main objectives of this study is therefore how best to improve existing teacher training policies and practices in order to foster the development of teacher competences relevant to inclusive education and training practices.

¹⁰ Within the Bologna Process the study programmes are to be restructured into a two-tier structure in which Bachelor and Master programmes are to be of either 3+2 or 4+1 years in length.

2. WIDER CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The countries in the Western Balkans have undertaken initiatives to adapt their education and training systems to national employment, social inclusion and competitiveness goals. However, implementation often lags behind declared policy goals. Persistent challenges include: the widening of choice and improvement of quality in vocational education, training and adult learning; the active engagement of social partners; the furthering of key competences; and, in particular, encouragement of the human sense of innovation and entrepreneurship so central to social and economic success. There is room for a massive improvement in teacher competences on inclusive education and efforts must also be made to reduce early school-leaving in contexts of socially and culturally diverse societies.

The term 'disadvantaged' could be attributed to many groups in the countries of this study when referring to access to, progress in and completion of aspects of quality education and training. A variety of minority groups are involved including ethnic communities (the Roma in particular but not exclusively) and disadvantaged children. The latter includes: children with disabilities and special needs; children from remote and rural areas; children of refugees or internally displaced persons; children from families deported from foreign countries (mostly within the EU); and many other groups. Gender is an important element, particularly when combined with any other factor of a disadvantaged background, and poverty is an attendant salient feature in the lives of a great many families in these minority sectors. The widest possible understanding of inclusion in education and training is needed if we are to capture the full scope of related problems and accommodate the specific problems of diverse disadvantaged groups in the Western Balkan countries. This is reflected in the conceptual framework of this study which takes an approach that is balanced between the general pluralism and equal opportunities perspectives.

This research is situated in a set of contexts where each country has different (and sometimes divergent) legislative, policy and practice initiatives in place. These contexts can be roughly categorised from most generic to most specific as:

1. general context of social inclusion developments and the promotion of ethnic and other diversity and tolerance and overall democratisation of society in a post-conflict area. These developments for the countries under study should be viewed in the light of the European perspective which has contributed to peace and stability and encouraged political and economic reform. Demonstrated fulfilment of the Copenhagen accession criteria of 1993 with specific reference to 'respect for and protection of minorities' is of paramount importance for the countries in this study in the EU accession process;¹¹
2. wider educational context, in which education and training is seen as the primary tool for social inclusion, the promotion of diversity and tolerance, and the building of a sustainable democracy based on active citizen participation. Within the description of the wider educational context, specific attention will be focused on understanding existing institutional, structural, political and other obstacles to social inclusion;
3. specific educational context of reforms to pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development, in line with the move toward learning outcomes and study programmes built around the professional competences concept and in accordance with the key role of teachers in ensuring perceptible favourable outcomes from education and training reform initiatives. Analysis of this context

¹¹ http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm (page accessed on 24 August 2009)

will also cover the specific regional challenges facing teacher education on inclusive education; elements that are reflected in attitudes to social inclusion and social cohesion in wider society.

2.1 General context – Social Inclusion and Diversity in a Post-Conflict Area

All of the countries involved in the study were exposed to some form of conflict in the period between the early 1990s and the present. The conflict ranged from open war, through ethnic-related violence at the peak of ethnic tension and oppression, to clashes within a single ethnic group motivated primarily by political differences and enabled by a weak rule of law and insufficient democratic culture.

The countries of the region are currently in a state of relative equilibrium although the situation is still unstable. Regional cooperation is on the increase through various trade agreements (such as Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA)) and bilateral or multilateral cooperation schemes. These developments are further supported by: the DG Enlargement Regional Programs and Multi-Beneficiary IPA Programming; the related Regional Cooperation Council,¹² and particularly the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital;¹³ the recent establishment of the South Eastern Europe Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning;¹⁴ and the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe¹⁵ which applies to Bulgaria and Romania as well as the countries in this study.

Mobility of people is also steadily rising for commercial, educational and private reasons. Although some specific administrative and political obstacles remain¹⁶ many of the Western Balkan countries¹⁷ benefitted from the lifting of visa regimes in December 2009.

The EU has identified policy areas and priorities relevant to inclusive education and training in the Enlargement Strategy 2008-2009 (EC, 2008b). While the Western Balkan countries are at various stages in EU membership process¹⁸ their progress can be tracked in their respective EC Progress Reports. Furthermore, the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (EU DG EMPL) is also focussed on the issue of social inclusion within the *EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process*,¹⁹ with particular attention on the situation in the Western Balkans (within the national reports) and that of disadvantaged groups like children and Roma. This entity commissioned a series of independent reports completed in August 2008 and synthesised in the January 2009 publication: *Social Protection and Social Inclusion in the Western Balkans: A Synthesis Report (EC, 2009)*. The report provides in-depth information, statistics and analysis on political, economic and demographic trends. This includes details of how the educational attainment analysed relates to labour market function; eligibility for, access to, and funding of social protection; general living conditions and groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion; access to pensions, healthcare and long-term care.

¹² <http://www.erisee.org/node/12> (page accessed on 24 August 2009)

¹³ <http://www.taskforcehumancapital.info/> (page accessed on 24 August 2009)

¹⁴ <http://www.seecel.hr/naslovnica/> (page accessed on 24 August 2009)

¹⁵ www.erisee.org (page accessed on 24 August 2009)

¹⁶ This is particularly the case between Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244) and Serbia, due to Serbia not recognising Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244) as an independent state.

¹⁷ Visa regimes were lifted on the 19th December 2009, for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia while visa regimes remain in place for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244).

¹⁸ Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have the status of candidates, while the remaining countries (except for Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244) which has special status) have signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreements.

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/index_en.htm (page accessed 24 August 2009)

These countries are all signatories to a number of international standard-setting documents, namely: the *Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (CoE, 1995a)*, (ratified by all countries apart from Kosovo);²⁰ the revised *European Social Charter (CoE, 1995b)*; the *European Convention on Human Rights (CoE, 1950)*; the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989)*; the *UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960)*; and the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006)*.

Furthermore, the countries are all participants in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, presided over by Serbia until 1 July 2009 when Slovakia took over the yearly mandate.

However, occasional outbursts of ethnically motivated unrest or even violence are testament to the fact that lasting peace and stability will only be achieved with the long-term, strong and holistic commitment of all social actors.

A particular issue of concern in this respect is the overwhelming poverty and significant differences in development within and across these countries. Low educational attainment in the population in general is one of the key factors of poverty. This is primarily viewed as a cause of poverty but is in fact also a consequence of a situation that is further exacerbated in certain ethnic groups and other minorities.

'POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENTS INDICATE THAT ETHNICITY IS ONE OF THE SIGNIFICANT FACTORS OF SHAPING POVERTY ... [THERE ARE] BIG DISCREPANCIES IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION' (ETF, 2007, PAGE 4)

These findings in essence reiterate those of other international or intergovernmental organisations such as the World Bank (World Bank, 2007) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2004) that ethnicity is a factor in limiting access to education and one that is particularly difficult to counteract given the political context. Additionally, the reports underline an even more complex situation for Roma who form an ethnic minority that faces multifaceted disadvantage of long standing in each of the countries. It also is important to stress that the issue of poverty and social exclusion is a pan-European issue, a fact further supported by the EU decision to dub 2010 the *European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion* including the countries of the Western Balkans in the list of participant nations.²¹

This brings us to the issue of obstacles in access to quality education. These obstacles may be of a financial, institutional or procedural, structural and socio-cultural, or political nature. The latter classification was developed for this study in order to adequately address the particular issues of the region.

Financial obstacles can include the lack of sufficient family or student resources for accessing specific levels of education (e.g. higher education where tuition fees are charged); the inability to access the necessary materials and resources for quality learning (from books and computers to sufficient space for independent learning); the lack of funds for maintenance while studying (which may force students to seek paid work or even to abandon their studies).

Institutional and procedural obstacles may include explicit tracking (i.e. explicit rules which prevent vertical and horizontal mobility between levels and types of institutions) but also implicit tracking due to specific elements of the transition procedures from one stage of education to the next.

²⁰ Albania 1999, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2000, Croatia 1997, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 1997, Montenegro 2001, Serbia 2001.

²¹ Article 11 of the Decision No 1098/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2008 on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010).

Structural obstacles include problems with insufficient institutional networks (e.g. limited or non-existent possibilities in rural or underdeveloped areas), problems with transportation to schools, but also inappropriate or non-existent infrastructure for pupils and students with special needs (e.g. aids to learning adapted for pupils with visual or hearing impairments).

Socio-cultural and linguistic obstacles include specific procedures for enrolment, progress and completion which do not take into account individual differences in socio-economic, cultural or linguistic backgrounds. These may result in segregation as pre-school testing of children assumes working knowledge of the majority language and is therefore essentially discriminatory to minority children who may not have the necessary skills.

Political obstacles frequently arise from omissions of action rather than overtly discriminatory action. This apparent lack of overt action does not, however, reduce the exclusive impact of political inaction and lack of focus on constructive legislative and fiscal support for inclusive education in many of the countries in the study. The centrality and influence of this political neglect effectively condones exclusion at all levels throughout society and is particularly difficult to overcome as it would require a combination of democratic social pressure, collaboration between various public sectors (health, social welfare and education) and international pressure from the EU and beyond.

Given the various obstacles and their potential multiplicative impact, it is evident that a holistic approach to quality education is essential for groups faced with complex disadvantages such as: (1) refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), whose integration problems become increasingly 'invisible to the system' through the frequent changes in the administrative status of such persons (e.g. some become citizens of the host country), the concentration of refugees in 'collective centres' far from the eyes of the general public; and (2) Roma, who suffer enduring multifaceted deprivation, stigmatised by the deep-rooted prejudice of majority populations and essentially forming a minority wherever they live. Furthermore, the strong impact of the lack of education on poverty is further exacerbated through low employment opportunities for socio-economically vulnerable ethnic groups (Fetsi et al., 2007) and particularly for young people who could escape recurrent generational poverty given sufficient time and opportunities in the worlds of education and work. It should be noted that the potential public non-financial benefits of education (OECD, 2007) also include crime reduction, democratisation, improved public health, political stability and respect for human rights on top of poverty reduction. However, these potential benefits cannot be achieved unless there is assurance of an education system accessible to all and structured to promote inter-cultural dialogue and equity in learning outcomes. Finally, it cannot be stressed strongly enough that inclusive education and training is a necessary element of an inclusive society but is insufficient in itself. Additional measures in other public sectors such as social welfare and health are necessary to support education.

2.2 Educational context – Education as a Tool for Democratisation, Stabilisation, Inclusion and the Promotion of Tolerance and Intercultural Understanding

The countries under study all embarked on a ‘root-and-branch’ reform of their education systems as part of the overall political and economic transition and the EU membership process. In some cases, EU and international trends and processes - the Bologna process for higher education or the Copenhagen process for VET – also impacted on these reforms. Some are also affected by international attention and strong donor interest in a particular issue, as was the case with the Decade of Roma. The countries have also undergone policy and strategy development processes leading to changes in education legislation. In some cases, this has been followed by reforms to supportive policy instruments such as funding mechanisms. Local or national NGOs, regional networks of experts and policy think tanks were all strongly involved in these developments during the early stages or in providing parallel support.

In the past there was a significant lack of comparable and reliable data on education but the situation has somewhat improved in recent years with an extensive amount of literature produced in the form of regional or national studies and projects, assessments of international and intergovernmental organisations and national reports. A number of projects and activities touching upon the issue of social inclusion and education are ongoing in the region or have been completed recently. These include the Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe²² project of the South East European Educational Network. The Open Society Institute has provided support to civil society and has produced analytical reports including the ongoing Monitoring Education for Roma.²³ Meanwhile, the Roma Education Fund (REF)²⁴ has provided direct support in terms of scholarships for Roma students and has made sustained efforts toward building policy capacity in the region. The work of both these entities has contributed to the development of inclusive policy and inclusive societies. There have also been a number of recent projects focusing on teacher education, such as Enhancing the Professional Development of Education Practitioners and Teaching/Learning Practices in SEE Countries²⁵ and the Regional Tuning of Teacher Education Curricula in the Western Balkans (Pantić, 2008).

Such regional activities are reliant upon (or should at least take into account) the work of various international or intergovernmental organisations on the issue, such as:

- OECD, notably the analysis and recommendations offered in: *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning* (OECD, 2007); *No More Failures – Ten Steps to Equity in Education* (Field et al, 2007) (which recommends 10 steps related to structure, practice and resources in education); *Teachers’ Matter – Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (McKensie et al., 2005), which underlines the importance of both pre-service and in-service training and also the need to make teacher education more flexible and responsive to the needs of schools and pupils; the *Teacher Education for Diversity* project 2008-2010²⁶ - an ongoing project focusing on common challenges and responses in the OECD countries in terms of teacher training for increasingly culturally diverse societies; and the OECD

²² <http://www.see-educoop.net/aeiq/> (page accessed 7 August 2009)

²³ http://www.soros.org/initiatives/esp/articles_publications/publications/monitoring_20061218/monitoring_20061218.pdf (page accessed 7 August 2009)

²⁴ www.romaeducationfund.hu (page accessed 24th December 2009)

²⁵ <http://www.see-educoop.net/portal/tesee.htm> (page accessed 7 August 2009)

²⁶ http://www.oecd.org/document/21/0,3343,en_2649_35845581_41651733_1_1_1_1,00.html (page accessed 7 August 2009)

Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS,²⁷ especially the latest report *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS* (OECD, 2009) focusing on: teacher professional development, beliefs, attitudes and practices, teacher appraisal and feedback, and school leadership. Over 70 000 teachers and school principals were surveyed in 23 countries as part of the project;

- ETF, notably the aforementioned *Social Inclusion of Ethnic Groups Through Education and Training: Elements of Good Practice* (ETF, 2007) and the work of EURAC for ETF on *Access to Education, Training and Employment of Ethnic Minorities in the Western Balkans* (2006),²⁸ that identifies three different models of approach to the education of minorities and the use of minority languages in education;²⁹
- Council of Europe, through its focus on intercultural dialogue;³⁰ minority languages - in particular the *European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages* (CoE, 1992); education for democratic citizenship³¹ (where a number of recommendations, studies and toolkits have been developed); education of Roma³², with a variety of activities and recommendations including the Recommendation of the Council of Ministers to the Member states on the education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe (CoE, 2000); as well as *How All Teachers Can Support Citizenship and Human Rights Education: A Framework for the Development of Competences* (Brett et al., 2009) which focuses on approximately 15 core competences teachers need to put democratic citizenship and human rights into practice in the classroom, the school and the wider community;
- EURYDICE, the key source of data on education in Europe, which publishes thematic studies, such as: *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe: Measures to Foster Communication with Immigrant Families and Heritage Language Teaching for Immigrant Children* (Eurydice, 2009a), *Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities* (Eurydice, 2009b), *Levels of Autonomy and Responsibilities of Teachers in Europe* (Eurydice, 2008) and *School Autonomy in Europe. Policies and Measures* (Eurydice, 2007);
- UNESCO, in particular its *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education* (UNESCO, 2009) which provides an overview of developments in the area of inclusive education (including an extensive list of relevant international conventions and declarations), addresses the issues of inclusion and quality in education, development of an inclusive curriculum, the role of policy makers, and, most relevant for the current study, the role of teachers; and
- work within the peer learning cluster focussed on teachers and teacher education under the Knowledge System for Lifelong Learning.³³

²⁷ http://www.oecd.org/document/0/0,3343,en_2649_39263231_38052160_1_1_1_1,00.html (page accessed 7 August 2009)

²⁸ <http://www.eurac.edu/about/projects/2006/index.htm?year=2006&which=693> (page accessed 7 August 2009)

²⁹ (1) The entire curriculum is taught in the minority language, usually achieved by the establishment of separate schools or classes for teaching in the minority language, which essentially leads to segregation. (2) The entire 'regular' school curriculum is taught in the majority language, while minority pupils can take additional courses in their mother tongue, which increases their already high workload and openly segregates them. (3) The third model can be called 'bilingual education', in which mother tongue and the minority language are used in parallel, with divergent success and impact. This approach is rarely used in the countries under study.

³⁰ <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/> (page accessed 7 August 2009)

³¹ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/default_EN.asp (page accessed 7 August 2009)

³² http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/default_en.asp (page accessed 7 August 2009)

³³ <http://www.kslll.net/peerlearningclusters/clusterdetails.cfm?id=14> (page accessed 7 August 2009)

This extensive list of international activities, analyses, policy developments and even legislative changes all support a strong focus on teacher competences. This perspective can be justified in several ways:

- Education system reform toward inclusive education is moving from the system level downwards in the countries under study. Legislation and strategies are now in place, many countries have well designed implementation mechanisms and new curricula are being developed and adopted for pre-school, primary and secondary education. The focus of reform is gradually shifting onto the interaction between pupils and teachers in the individual school and classroom. The change to more inclusive education will simply not happen if the key actors of the process, the teachers, are not equipped with the necessary attitudes, skills, knowledge and motivations within a supportive environment
- The global economic crisis, the economic situation of the countries in question and the intense competition for public funds between education and other public sectors (health, security, pensions) make it highly unlikely that additional resources will be allocated to the sector. The increased pressure for reform will not be reflected in significant budget increases for outstanding infrastructure improvements, in terms of: improved access to existing buildings and classrooms for all students; an extended network of schools in remote areas; and the development of teaching materials fitted to the learning styles and abilities of each student. This means the necessary education reforms are even more heavily reliant on those motivated and skilled teachers who are: responsive to the needs of the community and of the individual child; able to adopt new approaches to educating children from varied backgrounds; and willing and able to participate actively in the development of new curricula or new policy documents and instruments.

The strong EU and international focus on teacher education through the work of the EU, OECD and Council of Europe has led to significant advances, but the region is still lagging behind in terms of relevant analysis of the competences required for the effective, efficient and, most importantly, inclusive teacher. So far, just two projects have focussed on teacher education in the countries under study. The first of these: *Enhancing the Professional Development of Education Practitioners and Teaching/Learning Practices in SEE countries* highlighted the issue of insufficient practical teacher training. The document showed that while teachers in South Eastern Europe (SEE) receive theoretical training on subject knowledge and skills within their pre-service training programmes, they are given little practical experience of teaching in a real-life classroom. As a result, the key recommendation of the project was to ensure that teacher education study programmes focus on competences relevant to the actual practice of teaching in a given environment.

It was this recommendation that inspired the *Regional Tuning of Teacher Education Curricula*.³⁴ This project identified some of the gaps between existing teacher training and the teaching competences needed in practice. It was encouraging to find that teachers valued competences such as commitment to equality, support of learning of all pupils and promotion of tolerance as the most important elements of teacher training for inclusive education. However, detailed inspections of some existing initial teacher training programmes showed actual coverage of those competences to be rare and sometimes even completely lacking. These findings suggest that changes in teacher awareness of the 'new' topics in education and school practices are not necessarily reflected in adequate changes in teacher preparation programmes.

The Tuning project also showed that little value was placed on the importance of competences pertinent to teacher participation in development of the education system, their own institutions or cooperation with the

³⁴ http://www.cep.edu.rs/eng/files/Tuning_Teacher_Education_Western_Balkans.pdf (page accessed 7 August 2009)

community. Teachers need to develop the competences required for inclusive classroom practices, and teacher education policies and programmes therefore need to include elements that increase teacher capacity to deal with inclusion-related factors that reach beyond the classroom and the school into areas such as parental and community involvement. This lack of a wider vision is one of the major challenges facing the promotion of inclusive school practices.

The low value given to teacher participation in system-wide debate on reform also implies a significant lack of a strong professional teacher voice of in terms of active teacher trade unions or other professional associations. While unions in the region tend to be quite vocal on issues of general employee rights, they are rather weak in terms of expertise on education reform, teacher education and inclusive education.

Furthermore, the lack of frameworks of standards for teacher training programmes, and the fragmented organisation of these programmes (pre-primary, class teachers and subject teachers³⁵) form systemic obstacles to relevant and effective teacher education. The fragmentation diverts attention from the pedagogical and didactic education of teachers and hampers the development of a multidisciplinary focus on education in general and education research in particular. Finally, this region is facing a significant challenge to reinstate the good standing of the teaching profession³⁶ in terms of respect, remuneration and wider social status, a situation also common to many countries outside the region.

³⁵ In the regional context, 'class teachers' refers to teachers in the first few years of primary education (the first 4 of a total 8 years) who teach the full spectrum of subjects on the curriculum. They are trained at teacher education colleges or faculties. 'Subject teachers' are teachers of particular subjects (mathematics, biology, history etc) and they are usually trained at separate faculties (faculty of mathematics or natural sciences, faculty of history or social sciences) and generally have insufficient pedagogical and didactic training, in both teaching theory and practice. Pre-primary teachers are trained in separate institutions of a non-university type in most of the countries under study..

³⁶ The 'teaching profession' includes teachers, head-teachers and those in higher management posts.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1 Key Concepts

For the purposes of this study *Mapping Policies and Practices for the Preparation of Teachers for Inclusive Education in Contexts of Social and Cultural Diversity*, the research team adopted common definitions of various key concepts. The definitions are based on academic research in the field and have been selected to reflect the common understanding of the concepts reached between the ETF and the researchers conducting the study. This report does not propose these definitions as norms for the study of teacher education or inclusive education in general, but they are included here to help interpret the findings of the present research.

3.1.1 Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a much researched topic that involves a number of challenges for policy-making and implementation processes. Conceptualisations of inclusive education vary from narrower views as ‘the attempt to educate persons with intellectual disabilities by integrating them as closely as possible into the regular structures of the educational system’, (Michailakis and Reich, 2009) to broader definitions as a ‘guiding principle helping to accomplish quality Education for All (EFA) – education systems that benefit from diversity, aiming to build a more just, democratic society’ (Acedo, 2008).

Inclusive education is broadly understood in this study to be the process by which schools attempt to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering and restructuring curriculum organisation and provision, and allocating resources to enhance equality of opportunity. This process enables schools to increase their capacity to accept all those pupils from the local community who wish to attend and in so doing reduce all forms of exclusion and degradation of students on the basis of disability, ethnicity, or anything that could render the school life of some children unnecessarily difficult (Sebba and Sachdev, 1997; Booth and Ainscow, 1998; Peček *et al*, 2006). Hence, inclusive education must become a mainstreamed general policy and practice in education and not a specific intervention addressing any one particular disadvantaged group. In this broader sense, inclusion is a process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion, whereby participation means greater recognition, acceptance and respect along with inclusion in the learning process and social activities in a way that enables an individual to develop a sense of belonging to society.

Teachers also have a wider professional role to play beyond their direct personal impact on an individual school operating within various levels of the education system, including the municipalities. Decentralisation of the education systems in the Western Balkan countries implies increased autonomy for schools, which may in turn lead to increased rights for professional decision-making by teachers informed by their wider evaluation of the socio-cultural ends of education and schooling. Liston and Zeichner (1990) argue that such reflection need not focus only on implicit social and cultural frameworks but also on the institutional features of schooling. Teaching professionals, they argue, must be able to analyse and change particular institutional arrangements and working conditions, especially those that might obstruct the implementation of their aims (Liston and Zeichner 1990:5).

3.1.2 Teacher Competences for Inclusion

A number of authors including Michailakis and Reich (2009) claim that there is a specific body of knowledge for working with 'special' children that needs to be adequately covered during teacher preparation. This may involve gaining an understanding of the socio-cultural factors that produce individual differences, or specialist knowledge about disability and children's learning needs, awareness of educational and social issues that can affect children's learning, and so on. Another distinct current stance, according to Florian and Rouse (2009), is that teacher competences for inclusive educational practices should include skills relevant to the improvement of teaching and learning for all including the capacity to reduce barriers to learning and participation as inclusion is not only about 'special' children. According to this view, teacher competence on inclusion should involve a multifaceted pedagogy that recognises how decisions informing teaching should take account of: children's individual characteristics; the learning that takes place outside school; and learners' previous knowledge, individual and cultural experiences and interests (Florian and Rouse, 2009).

This study adopts a broader view of competence as an integrated set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Assumption 1 in Annex 4). Even the most comprehensive coverage of relevant themes is unlikely to anticipate every type of difficulty teachers might encounter in their professional lives. It is essential that teachers accept responsibility for improving the learning and participation of *all* children in their classes in order to develop teacher competences for inclusive education. For this, teachers need to develop competences that involve knowledge, skills and dispositions to teach equitably and to promote the learning of all pupils. Moreover, teachers need to be able to seek and use the support of other actors who can serve as valuable resources in inclusive education, such as support staff, parents, communities, school authorities and relevant others. Hence, pre-service and in-service teacher education and training should be aligned to inclusive education approaches in order to build the teacher capacities necessary to make diversity work.

3.1.3 Teacher Preparation

Teacher education in the Western Balkan countries (and elsewhere) has often assumed that schools are mono-ethnic institutions with homogeneous class compositions. It has been increasingly recognised that teachers need to be better prepared to recognise, value and deal with diversity, as well as to deal with issues of discrimination and disadvantage in education and training, and work with students and parents from diverse economic, social and cultural backgrounds. The present study explores to what extent such inclusive approaches are actually adopted in the existing policies and practices of pre-service and in-service teacher preparation in the countries under study.

Policies are understood in this study to refer to formal, governmental policies, regulations and legislation, as well as the actual implementation of these in existing practice by different relevant stakeholders in teacher preparation for inclusive education.

Pre-service teacher education refers to education that teacher candidates are expected to undergo in order to qualify for teaching. This involves both programmes specifically designed for future teachers, and programmes for a disciplinary area that equivalent to a school subject, which may or may not have a special track for teachers. Preparation of teachers based on competences for inclusion in real contexts of diversity is linked to higher education reform of in the Western Balkans, primarily within the framework of the Bologna Process.

In-service teacher training and development refers to education and training activities engaged in by primary and secondary school teachers following their initial professional certification, intended mainly or exclusively

to improve their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes in order that they can educate children more effectively in contexts of social and cultural diversity.

3.2 Research Questions and Study Design

The research design follows on from the key concepts described above and the assumptions adopted for the study based on an extensive literature review as presented in Annex 4. The following section describes the research questions and how they are explored in this study.

To reach the objectives set in the study, namely, (1) to analyse policies and practices regarding teacher pre-service training and in-service professional development schemes at the country level, and (2) to identify issues, challenges and good practice with regard to the skills and competences required for inclusive education practices by teachers from primary and secondary education; the following research questions are addressed by the study:

1. What teacher competences are needed for inclusive education in situations of social and cultural diversity?
2. What is the current situation regarding the inputs, processes and outcomes of a) pre-service b) in-service teacher preparation for inclusive education?
3. How can the situation regarding a) pre-service b) in-service teacher preparation for inclusive education be improved?

3.2.1 Research Question 1: Teacher Competences Relevant for Inclusive Education

Exploration of the first research question about teacher competences relevant for inclusive practices, is based on the concept of competence understood as a combination of knowledge, skills and dispositions (Assumption 1 in Annex 4) and a belief that teachers and other education professionals are themselves an important source of information on exactly what the competences relevant for inclusive practices in situations of social and cultural diversity mean to their work (Assumption 2 in Annex 4). Thus, this report examines the extent to which internationally recognised elements of competence for inclusion are exemplified in participant responses collected in focus groups and interviews with teachers working in environments of diversity, but also those of school principals, parents and community members, government representatives, teacher educators and relevant NGO and donor representatives.

A special instrument was developed to serve as a starting point for discussions with teachers in the focus groups. The table of competences for inclusion (Annex 3) was developed using the relevant items from a previously conducted project *Tuning Teacher Education in the Western Balkans*, key European documents and international research. It thus combines the theoretical assumptions and formulation arrived at in the regional context. The table was used as an initial list in the focus groups to prompt discussion on how those formulations translate into daily teaching practices, the competences teachers need to develop, the best way to develop them, and so on.

It is important to note that the information collected in the focus groups was used critically to enrich understanding of how teachers perceive competence for inclusion compared to a theoretically based ideal and to provide context-relevant information. It was complemented by information collected from other relevant stakeholders such as teacher educators, school principals and support staff, community and parent representatives as already described above.

3.2.2 Research Question 2: Mapping of Policies and Practices for Teacher Preparation

Exploration of the second research question on the current situation of pre-service and in-service teacher preparation for inclusive education is approached from the perspectives of general pluralism and equal opportunities (Assumption 3 in Annex 4) and considers the importance of context for the development of inclusive dispositions (Assumption 4 in Annex 4). In the exploration of current teacher preparation, it is important to examine the extent to which all inputs, processes and outcomes include inclusion-relevant elements (e.g. individualised approaches to learning) while also attempting to identify any specific foci on issues relevant to dealing with students at risk of exclusion. The report thus concentrates on analysis of existing teacher preparation policies and practices and to what extent social inclusion related provisions are mainstreamed in policies relevant to inclusive education and teacher preparation in particular. There is further examination of whether the existing policies and practices contain implicit barriers to inclusive education, and whether they contain an affirmative focus on groups that have long been marginalised in the region.

Policy mapping involved the collection of information on the general context of teacher preparation for inclusion (e.g., policies on inclusion for potentially disadvantaged groups in education and training, general provisions for teacher preparation, etc.) and policies and regulations specifically referring to teacher preparation on inclusion (e.g., any provisions referring specifically to inclusion in the requirements for entry into teaching, teacher standards, induction, licensing and promotion).

The mapping of practices presented in this report includes an overview of both pre-service and in-service teacher preparation and development. This was accomplished through an online survey, by means of desk research, and in focus groups and interviews with relevant stakeholders. The approach was similar to that used in policy mapping; searching relevant data sources (catalogues of in-service programmes, existing secondary sources of relevant information on pre-service teacher preparation and in-service programmes implemented by various local and international NGOs, identification of other forms of continuing and sometimes informal professional development such as learning through networking, peer evaluation). These issues were listed in grids developed to guide data collection across the countries.

An online survey was developed to collect data on pre-service teacher preparation programmes. Research evidence on programme characteristics that help student teachers develop competences for inclusion (Assumptions 5 and 6 in Annex 4) were used to design online survey questions on course units, practical experiences, opportunities for interaction with families, critical reflection, discussion and dialogue, and beliefs about the nature of knowledge.

The data collected through desk research and the survey and the mapping of both policies and practices were complemented with qualitative data collected in individual and group interviews, and focus groups with information-rich policy-makers, course designers, teacher educators, teachers, school principals, community representatives and parents. These strategies provided opportunities for follow-up on issues identified in the desk research, granting comprehensive insight into various stakeholder perspectives on inclusive education practices and teacher roles.

3.2.3 Research Question 3: How Teacher Preparation could be Improved

The third research question asks how existing pre-service and in-service teacher education policies and practices could be improved to further help teachers develop competences for inclusion and considers the relevance of cross-national research for policy-making (Assumption 7 in Annex 4). This report discusses the information collected in mapping existing policies and practices with a view to identifying opportunities for

improvements bearing in mind desired competences for inclusive education identified in international research and the barriers identified in each country context.

On the basis of findings from both field work and desk research, the authors have compiled a number of recommendations for different stakeholders with the support of an editorial team of experts on inclusion and teacher training in the region. The recommendations primarily aim to indicate potential areas for improvement in pre-service and in-service teacher education. However, these recommendations and the report itself aim to serve as discussion material for wider policy debate on teacher competences in the context of social and cultural diversity.

The recommendations have been grouped according to their relevance for different stakeholders: policy-makers; teacher educators and course designers; and teachers. Also, examples of best practice on inclusion are highlighted and discussed in terms of their relevance and transferability across the region throughout the study.

3.3 Research Methodology

A predominantly qualitative research strategy was adopted for this study in order for the researchers to provide more effective mapping of policies and practices in Albania. This allows for in-depth analysis of participant responses to a number of important questions specifically on the relevance, unintended effects and impact of policies and practice in the country. The qualitative approach to research not only allows for more diversity in responses, but also adds value to the process itself as it provides the capacity to adapt to new developments or to anticipate and address any issues arising. The qualitative research approach offered a number of characteristics that were advantageous to the Albanian context, including: the use of natural settings as a direct source of data with the researcher as the key instrument; concern with the process rather than simply with outcomes; and inductive data analyses. Thus, the researchers do not rely upon a priori questions or hypotheses to be tested, but are essentially concerned with meaning, in other words, with participant perspectives, thoughts and assumptions as expressed in their own words.

In order to take full advantage of these characteristics of qualitative research, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a wide range of respondents. In addition, the extensive number of texts and documents collected in initial desk research were analysed and used for reference throughout all stages of the research to enrich the original findings. The relatively high response rate from participants in Albania, especially to the e-survey, also allowed for some limited quantitative analysis which is mainly used to add validity to the findings of this report.

3.3.1 Desk Research Phase

The initial research phase was conducted as a desk review of relevant documentation and was helpful in further shaping the instruments to be used in the subsequent field research. The material consulted included: research reports and articles focussed on inclusive education and relating to the teacher roles and competences needed to support this approach; comprehensive EU policy and legislative documents; and Albania-specific legal, professional and other relevant documents. This phase provided essential input for the qualitative part of the research.

The desk research covered three thematic areas:

- Context analysis

- Policies and practices for pre-service teacher preparation
- Policies and practices for in-service teacher education and continuing professional development

The context analysis aimed to explain the overall policy and legislative context in which teacher preparation and inclusive education are embedded. It focuses on the education system, human and minority rights, inclusion and exclusion in education.

The analysis of policies and practices for pre-service teacher preparation aims at providing information on legislation and the regulation of pre-service teacher preparation programmes. It focuses on the elements related to competences needed for the development of inclusive education practices by teachers at both classroom and school levels, in the organisation and management of pre-service programmes, programme design, arrangements for mentoring of students during school practice, the teacher recruitment process, professional standards, career advancement and promotion.

The analysis of policies and practices for in-service teacher education and continuing professional development considers the general standing of the teaching profession in Albania (including recruitment, professional standards and promotion) and regulations and access to in-service practice-related programmes relevant to the development of teacher competences for inclusive education. This section provides further description of training practices, particularly the proportion of training programmes that focus on inclusive education. Information about training providers includes programme content and application procedures for these courses and other forms of in-service development. It also examines the incentives offered to motivate teachers to attend in-service programmes in general and programmes on inclusive education practices in particular.

The desk research included a review of a wide range of primary source documents, although secondary sources were also used in a critical manner. The materials reviewed in the desk research included: relevant acts, laws, by-laws, international conventions and other relevant documents such as regulations, memos, directives, ordinances, guidelines effecting education or related areas in Albania; national Albanian government strategies on or related to education and inclusion, with a particular focus on the role of teachers and teacher education; various institutional policies and regulations affecting teachers; teacher education catalogues and other descriptions of in-service programmes; other relevant analysis carried out by other governmental agencies, academic institutions, non-governmental bodies and individuals (i.e. secondary sources).

The desk research was undertaken by Albania country team members from July to September 2009. Due to the ongoing education reform in Albania, a number of the primary source documents analysed in the course of this research were still being processed in their draft form and are therefore cited as aspirations rather than policies or actions put into effect.

3.3.2 Field Research Phase

The field research at the heart of this qualitative research study provided opportunities for discussion of current programmes and trends in pre-service and in-service development of teachers for inclusive education with primary and secondary teachers, teacher educators, school principals and NGO activists. In addition, researchers were able to discuss factors specific to Albania in terms of the barriers to and expectations of inclusive education from the perspective of teacher professional education. The Albania country team approached a variety of target groups using tools appropriate to the intended outcomes.

Three key groups were targeted, namely: teacher educators and trainers in (1) pre-service and (2) in-service programmes; teachers; and parents and community members.

The field research was complemented by an e-survey targeting teacher educators in programmes for the preparation of class teachers and subject teachers, and teacher trainers engaged in in-service programmes. The teacher educators and trainers were surveyed on: whether competences for inclusive education occupy a specific area in teacher education programmes; the degree of mainstreaming of inclusion issues throughout the programmes; teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of existing teacher training programmes in developing inclusive education; and respondent perceptions of which competences they consider necessary for inclusive education.

Thus, information relevant to the development of pre-service and in-service programmes for teacher training was primarily collected from teacher educators, teachers, and student teachers. In addition, information-rich individual teacher educators and trainers were also interviewed to add more in-depth perspective and to elaborate on the issues relevant to teacher education and training mentioned above. Focus groups were conducted with teachers experienced in inclusive education from throughout Albania. They covered a variety of settings and issues relevant to inclusive education, and provided specific information on participant perceptions of: what competences are needed for inclusive education; the effectiveness of preparation for inclusive practices in education (pre-service, in-service); the application of inclusive practices (what kind of things an inclusive teacher does in and out of the classroom); beliefs about the knowledge, learning and educability of students.

The focus groups were organised on the premise that teacher practitioners with hands-on experience are in a position to evaluate pre-service and in-service training and the importance of teacher beliefs in shaping practice and performance. Other focus groups with parents and community members discussed the following issues: perceptions of the teacher competences necessary for inclusion; the role of the teacher in promoting inclusion and the justification of this; how teachers should perform their role in promoting inclusion; how teachers (and their inclusive practices) affect students in particular and society in general; information about practices and issues involved in parental and community cooperation with schools (e. g. on student well being, discipline, school achievement, particular educational needs); the potential influence of parents and communities on decisions made at school level.

The parent and community focus groups provided opportunities for these stakeholders to elaborate their views on the concept of inclusive education. They were included according to the rationale that they might provide support for or pressure against inclusion (e.g. parents expressing concern that a child with disabilities might detract from the amount of attention and effort that class teacher could pay their own children, or Roma community members pushing for the school to organise activities to include their children and promote the values and traditions of this community).

The secondary target groups for the field research were: school principals and school support services (school social workers, educational psychologists, etc.), local education authority representatives, system-level policy decision makers, student teachers, representatives of NGOs and donors (those providing additional training in inclusive education along with opportunities for experiential teaching and learning in pilot inclusive education programmes).

The student teachers were surveyed through an online e-survey, but the other the secondary target groups were mainly interviewed face to face or by telephone. Appropriate representative individuals were carefully selected on the basis of the degree and depth of their personal or institutional contribution, and the relevance

and quality of their provision. They were deliberately targeted to provide information and views on the relevance of teacher competences in ensuring inclusive education practices. They also provided additional insights into how they see their own role in ensuring the development of teacher competences for inclusive education by supporting teacher training and developing means of further enhancing teacher competences on this score.

School principals and school support services were interviewed to discuss their perception of their roles in supporting teacher competences for inclusion and inclusive practices. Local and regional education authority representatives were interviewed to provide insights into the issues of relevance for inclusive education at the local level. They were asked for details of any support they are able to provide for the development of inclusive education and the role they assign to teachers in creating inclusive education in their local environment. System level policy makers are key stakeholders in developing and ensuring national policies on inclusive education and in establishing the role of teachers and teacher competences within such policies. They were asked about the existence and status of such policies, any desired policies for that area and the means for implementing such policies. Students were e-surveyed to discuss their views, beliefs and dispositions on inclusive education and the need for inclusive education competences in their education as future teachers. NGOs and donors were asked about their view of the current provision of teacher education for inclusive education in the country and, more importantly, on the support they provide to help teachers develop inclusive competences and practices, both through formal courses and experiential learning in pilot programmes.

The field research phase provided an opportunity for researchers to access respondent insights on current practices and the degree of implementation of inclusive education-related policies in Albania. Practicing teachers, student teachers, parents and community members, middle level education managers (school principals, local education authority staff, etc.) and NGO representatives were relatively easy to approach and they also provided particularly useful information pertinent to the research questions. Researchers gave particular consideration to the preparation and timing of the e-survey in order to ensure a satisfactory level of participation from all target groups. Without this forethought, the survey would have been problematic given the low-speed or even absence of internet connection in some parts of the country.

3.4. Participants

Respondents were selected through a purposive sampling approach, both to identify information-rich individuals from relevant stakeholder groups and to ensure a variety of perspectives. Seven focus groups were conducted with teachers in Librazhd, Elbasan, Gjirokastër, Berat, Vlora, Durrës and Tirana (50 participants in total), six focus groups with parents and community representatives in Librazhd, Gjirokastër, Berat, Vlora, Durrës and Tirana (44 participants in total). Representatives of local authorities (including in-service teacher-trainers) accounted for 18 interviews in Librazhd, Gjirokastër, Berat, Vlora, Durrës and Tirana. There were 16 pre-school and school principals interviewed in Librazhd, Gjirokastër, Berat, Vlora, Durrës and Tirana, 12 teacher educators in Elbasan, Gjirokastër, Berat, Vlora, Durrës and Tirana, two higher-level policy makers in Tirana and 10 NGO representatives (also including in-service teacher-trainers) in Librazhd, Elbasan, Gjirokastër, Durrës and Tirana (58 interviewees in total). In addition, 31 teachers, 17 teacher educators, 16 student teachers and four other professionals responded to the survey (68 respondents in total). There were a total of 220 participants in this research.³⁷

³⁷ Note that some of the participants in focus group discussions and interviews also took part in the survey. Similarly, only some of those who took part in the survey participated in focus group discussions and interviews. The overlap in numbers is difficult to quantify due to most survey respondents opting to maintain anonymity.

4. OVERALL CONTEXT OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION IN ALBANIA

4.1 Context

Following the collapse of the half-century long communist regime and ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by the Albanian parliament in 1992, the Government of Albania (GoA) gradually began to consider the rights of all children in terms of to the most appropriate form of education. Changes in education led to improvement of the physical infrastructure and curricula, although the inclusion perspective is still lacking in the latter.

The GoA pledged to make education a national priority in 2005 and reaffirmed this commitment following the general elections of 28 June 2009. However, according to official data, total budget expenditure on education only increased slightly from 3.2% of GDP in 2004–2005³⁸ to 3.5 % of GDP in 2008.³⁹ Other sources maintain the figure is closer to 2.9%; well below the world and European averages of 4.6% and 5.2% respectively.⁴⁰ GoA has committed to increase the education funding to 3.6% of GDP by 2011 (Ministry of Labour Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2007).

Equality of opportunities for people with disabilities in Albanian society is guaranteed by the Constitution: Articles 18 and 25 guarantee the right of all citizens, including people with disabilities, to freedom from discrimination and Article 57 guarantees the right to compulsory education for all.⁴¹

The National Education Strategy 2004-2015 (Ministry of Education and Science, 2004a) concentrates on pre-university education and recognises the rigidity and high degree of centralised management in this sector. It sets ambitious, short and long term, targets aiming to reform the education system by decentralising governance and increasing the autonomy of schools. It also aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning through the development of quality assurance instruments and a National Curriculum Framework, ensuring provision of teacher development and addressing the issues of funding and VET.

The National Strategy for Children⁴² 2001-2005 saw the first cross-sector attempt to address children's issues holistically by ensuring equal access to quality education for all regardless of ability, ethnicity, social and family status, religious background and gender. Nevertheless, monitoring of strategy implementation has shown gaps in provision and the development of inclusive education alternatives for marginalised children, including children with disabilities, is one of the areas where targets have not been met.⁴³ Despite this, the GoA set up an inter-ministerial body to oversee implementation of this strategy and to form links with the National Strategy for pre-university education in order to help achieve its targets. This committee was responsible for developing policy frameworks which aimed to address the enrolment gap in education deriving from and related to the issues of gender discrimination, ethnicity, orphaned and abandoned children, children affected by internal migration, children of divorced or single parents, children of parents who

³⁸ INSTAT, *Shqipëria ne Shifra/Albania in Figures 2008*.

³⁹ Ministry of Finances of Albania, *Buletini Fiskal 2009*.

⁴⁰ Development Data Group, *The World Bank 2008 World Development Indicators Online*. Washington, DC, and CIA World Fact book, 2009.

⁴¹ Albanian Constitution, Approved by the Albanian Parliament on 21 October 1998.

⁴² National Strategy for Children, Republic of Albania (prepared by the National Committee on Women and Family, 2001).

⁴³ Recognized in the governmental (inter-ministerial committee) report on the implementation of this Strategy, approved by decision of the Council of Ministers, no. 368, date 31.05.2005.

migrate abroad for work, and children with intellectual, physical and learning disabilities.⁴⁴ According to international monitoring reports the latter group are deprived of many of their basic human rights including the right to quality basic education (World Bank, 2006).

The National Strategy on People with Disabilities⁴⁵ received criticism for its lack of timed targets, but nonetheless formed another inter-ministerial and cross-sector attempt to define rights-based objectives and policies to increase provision for this group and thus improve their situation. It represented the will of all the parties involved to harmonise Albanian education policy with a view to inclusion. The Strategy on Education For All Fast-track Initiative (EFA/FTI, Ministry of Education, 2004b) launched at the same time represented a GoA endeavour to increase the momentum behind its commitment to guarantee equality in education provision in line with international requirements.⁴⁶ However, no timeline has been set for the Strategy objectives and little is known about its implementation.

The Strategy on Roma People⁴⁷ recognises the extremely low school completion rates of Roma students (average 4.02–5.05 years of education). It prioritises Albanian language support classes for these students over classes in the Roma language, with the latter strategy only considered in case of relatively large Roma settlements. The Strategy urges the government to promote the education of Roma students by offering scholarships and subsidies to Roma families, but suffers from a lack of measurable and time-bound objectives, as do many other strategies. The National Strategy on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence (2007-2010)⁴⁸ provides a number of good directions on how to enhance female enrolment and completion rates in compulsory education, but is still in the pre-implementation stage.

Arguably the most ambitious cross-sector policy document of the GoA, the Social Inclusion Crosscutting Strategy 2007-2013 (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2007),⁴⁹ aims to prevent students leaving formal education early by ensuring access to a quality education for particularly marginalised groups of students. It sets specific targets for students at risk of exclusion including those with disabilities and children from Roma backgrounds. This document is particularly important for Albania as its implementation will be monitored and measured closely in the EU accession process along with the EU Stabilisation and Accession Agreement (SAA).

The pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania is governed by the 1995 Law on Pre-University Education.⁵⁰ Article 3 of this Law recognises the right of all citizens to education regardless of social status, ethnicity, language, gender, religion, race, political creed, health and economic condition. Articles 8 and 9 require compulsory and free education of at least 8 years duration for all children up to the age of 16. Article 10 recognises the right of children of ethnic minorities to compulsory education in their own language to be provided in separate schools and school units. It also includes a commitment to facilitate the teaching of the Albanian language, traditions and culture in order for the children to enjoy equal opportunities for participation in social, political, cultural and economic life. Article 40/2 specifies that separate classes or institutions should be provided for those students whose specific needs cannot be met by the regular

⁴⁴ Inter-Ministerial coordination committee-made up of MoLSA, MoES, MoH and Mol.

⁴⁵ Launched by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in 2003, approved by the Council of Ministers in 7.1.2005.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Education and Science and the World Bank Project on Education, 2004.

⁴⁷ Drafted by an inter-ministerial committee led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs on 2003.

⁴⁸ Launched by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2006.

⁴⁹ Drafted by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in 2007 and approved by the Council of Ministers in January 2008.

⁵⁰ Law no. 7952 date 21.06.1995, changed by the Parliament of Albania by Law no. 8387, date 30.07.1998.

(mainstream) schooling system. Article 39/1 explicitly recognises public special education as a constituent part of the public education system in Albania.

For many years ambiguities arising from the content of this Law resulted in confusion about the role of schools. The consequences were suffered by many students, especially those with special educational needs (SEN). These children were often excluded from mainstream classrooms or viewed as a burden by teachers unaware of their educational responsibility to meet their human and educational needs. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and related government agencies are currently actively developing a new law to replace the Law on Pre-University Education. The new document takes account of changes in education since the existing law was passed. MoES officials state that the new law is expected to reflect and respond to the restructuring of the education system to include non-public/private institutions and reflect other priorities set through the various national strategies. The intention is to provide greater breadth in the implementation of inclusive and quality education, starting with pre-school education for children aged 3 to 6 years old. MoES officials admit that about 30% of children, including children with disabilities and Roma children, still do not attend kindergarten despite increased efforts to strengthen the pre-school system.

The Normative Clause on Pre-University Education,⁵¹ a guide for public schools, marked the first and most important MoES attempt to date to consider the compulsory education of students with disabilities in mainstream schools⁵² whilst recognising special schools as the main providers of education for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in those places where such institutions exist.⁵³ This document constituted the first national statement that no category of student was to be excluded from compulsory education, irrespective of their abilities. In tandem, it guaranteed three forms of education: mainstream schools, special schools or other institutions (e.g. education at home), for children unable to attend either mainstream or special schools for various reasons.⁵⁴

The Normative Clause states that students with disabilities should be taught through a simplified version of the compulsory curriculum adjusted to their possibilities and abilities. Consequently teachers are free to develop and implement Individual Education Plans (IEPs) with students with SEN. The Clause provides for reduced class sizes and enhanced remuneration for teachers with students with SEN in their classes.

The Normative Clause is seen to have paved the way for the development of inclusive education initiatives in Albania. In the last year, the MoES has been leading a consultation process to review this document and respond to pressure from civil society, actors within the Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) and the changing demands of the education system. The process should be complete by the end of 2010 and could lead to a new Normative Clause with a greater focus on inclusive education. The new or revised Normative Clause is also expected to include comprehensive guidelines for the education of pre-school children aged from 3 to 6 years. However, although MoES has expressed a commitment to revise this document for the past two years, no tangible progress has yet been seen.

⁵¹ Dispozitat Normative per Arsimin Parauniversitar, Ministry of Education and Science, 2002.

⁵² Normative Clause on Pre-University Education Article 68/2.

⁵³ Normative Clause on Pre-University Education Article 68/1.

⁵⁴ Normative Clause on Pre-University Education Article 57.

4.2 Teacher Competences for Inclusive Education

During the research activities in Albania, teachers were encouraged to reflect upon and discuss their understanding of the competences needed for inclusive education. They identified certain skills they considered of vital importance to in modifying their teaching methods, classroom management and relationship with students and parents in order to accommodate the demands of an increasingly diverse group of students on the basis of their current practices. These skills include the ability to:

- develop an understanding of diversity and the right of every child to learn and develop in the school nearest to their home
- gain knowledge about various disabilities and how they influence the learning processes of a child
- develop empathy and patience in dealing with both students with SEN and their parents
- be open and actively seek knowledge on student-centred teaching methodologies and individualised planning and teaching in order to meet the demands of students with SEN; develop and implement IEPs based on the specific learning ability of the pupil and create specific instructions for students with learning difficulties. This involves setting specific, often lower, standards of expected achievement for some students.

They would also need to be able to:

- develop and administer individual tests for students with SEN based on their specific learning abilities and level of academic achievement
- differentiate delivery of classes adapting them to the specific needs of students
- consult and work in teams with school psychologists, social workers (so far mostly provided by local NGOs) and parents whenever possible (such action has been rare to date)—and cooperate with child developmental psychologists, hearing and speech therapists, physiotherapists and psychiatrists
- plan for other pupils in the class to help deliver parts of the lesson and support pupils with SEN to learn and socialise in classroom and outdoors activities
- use group-work in creating create groups of pupils with mixed abilities and ethnic and social backgrounds when applying student-centred teaching methods
- share information and expertise with parents and work with and learn from the expertise offered by DPOs (when available) and other interest groups, and
- help create, maintain and make use of a resources room within the school (at present only one school in Librazhd has such a facility)

Parents of (predominantly) SEN and Roma students were asked to identify practices they have witnessed and those they would have liked to see in making teaching better tailored to their children. They identified the following:

- Teachers must pay special attention to the specific needs of the students when teaching them or overseeing aspects of their social life and development.

- Teachers of lower grades (lower primary, grades 1-4) make the students feel appreciated and worthwhile and they encourage the other students to be similarly positive as a result of training and support received (provided by MEDPAK⁵⁵ in Librazhd and Save the Students in Librazhd, Tirana, Berat and Gjirokastër). Parents are concerned about what will happen to their youngsters when they reach the higher grades.
- Not all teachers show a genuine level of interest and commitment toward students with disabilities, especially in the upper grades (upper primary, grades 5-9). They need to individualise their teaching to respond to the needs of these students.
- Many teachers develop IEPs for students but they do not always consult with parents in doing so. Most of the programs should be individualised further and so should the teaching.
- In two locations Roma and Egyptian students feel quite well integrated with the others and there is no discrimination or barriers to learning in the classroom.⁵⁶ Teachers share information with parents (Roma parent) and give Roma and Gypsy students leading roles in extra-curricular activities where their musical and organisational capacities are appreciated. However, some of these families move frequently across the border to Greece or to other places in the course of the school year.⁵⁷ Sometimes the other students have progressed in their classes by the time they return and, although the school is happy to accept the students, it is difficult for the returnees to catch up.
- Teachers should be more patient with students with disabilities as they are aware that they require more support than most other students.
- Teachers need to be patient with parents as well as students because many parents are in difficult situations and they have the right to demand the best for their children. Teachers also need to communicate better with parents and not neglect or underestimate them simply because some parents are not well-educated.
- Teachers need to be supported and trained by the authorities. It is not always their fault that they do not know how to work with students with additional support needs as they have not received adequate training. They need to know how to work with students with specific disabilities and they also need to know how to handle the difficult behaviour many pupils display in school these days.

⁵⁵ Local DPO in Librazhd.

⁵⁶ Schools in areas of mixed Roma, Gypsy and other inhabitants in Gjirokastër and Tirana.

⁵⁷ In Gjirokastër only.

4.3 Barriers to Inclusion

Since the collapse of the communist regime, many minority communities and people dependent upon government welfare have experienced neglect and ostracism that has resulted in a diminishing sense of self-worth (De Soto, 2005). The Albanian community perceives welfare recipients as people who take no responsibility for themselves and individuals with disabilities suffer from similar perceptions, as was confirmed by parents of students with disabilities and some head-teachers participating in this research. Prolonged discrimination and negative social perceptions have led to strong prejudice against these groups, including children, with no regard for the how they came to be so vulnerable. Teacher and peer discrimination is one of the major reasons cited for Roma and Gypsy children not attending school (European CARDS program, 2006) although the teachers surveyed in this research would not accept this readily. Prejudice and the particularities of their needs, and attempts to address them as separate from the majority of the population have distanced them from the mainstream community. The vicious circle of poverty, low levels of educational achievement and literacy further intensifies and marginalises ethnic and disabled groups (De Soto, 2005).

MoES officials recognise the value of support provided by international organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, the Soros Foundation and Save the Children in GoA efforts to develop an inclusive approach to ethnic minorities. This approach aims to develop and consolidate the intellectual and economic capacities of all ethnic groups (including the Roma minority) valuing their rich culture and traditions as part of the diverse and exciting history of Albania. Positive discrimination policies often marginalise these groups further and distance them from the broader Albanian community, proving detrimental to interventions on inclusion. The stigma of their background has a significant impact on students who often experience discrimination and ridicule in schools, as is openly admitted by parents and of which teachers are reluctantly aware.

Albanian legislation considers the Roma people a linguistic not ethnic minority; an element cited as a barrier to Roma engagement in mainstream education by many authors (Maksutaj and Hazizaj, 2005), and the lack of mastery of the Albanian language in their early years has been blamed for students dropping out of school. Roma parents participating in focus group discussions in Berat, Gjirokastër and Tirana thought that it was more important for their children to learn basic literacy and numeracy in Albanian rather than their mother tongue as this would increase their chances of integration into mainstream society and the labour market. (These comments were very much in line with the views expressed in the Albanian National Strategy on Roma People which consulted with a number of Roma associations). Documentary analysis shows that there are only two qualified Roma teachers in the country⁵⁸ compared with far larger numbers with Greek or Macedonian ethnic backgrounds.

The two most significant causes of student dropout from of schools in Albania are economic (35 % of 10-14 year olds) and fading interest in a form of education they perceive as irrelevant (20 % of total dropouts) (Rashid and Dorabawila, 1999). In line with other reports (Musai and Boce, 2003), the teachers, head-teachers and parents participating in this research acknowledged the correlation between these factors and attendance and dropout levels. The teachers implied that economic motives are often behind the internal migration of families from rural areas and small towns towards bigger industrialised urban areas. The regional and local education authorities admitted that while they struggle to attract children to slowly emptying classrooms in most parts of the country, many schools in the capital have 45 or more pupils in each class. Poor levels of student interest and the lack of parental support for school activities are also cited as

⁵⁸ A country school in Berat and a Roma NGO in Tirana.

significant indicators. According to the students, however, most of them drop out through their lack of interest in school and their unwillingness to attend (*idem.*).

Most of the working and street children in Albania are Roma and Gypsy and are disadvantaged in comparison to students from other backgrounds as they only receive an average of 4.02-5.05 years of schooling. Current education policy (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2003) notes this situation but a new inclusion-oriented education policy needs more targeted interventions to provide for these students. The situation of street children has grown out of the vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy and an education system in need of major reform.⁵⁹

There are also negative perceptions of children with disabilities. Many parents feel so embarrassed that they keep them at home (Closs et al, 2003) thus depriving them of an education and valuable social experiences. There is limited professional expertise within MoES and the 12 special education institutions to provide specialised care and to assess disability in order for children with minor disabilities to be included in mainstream classrooms (Albanian Disability Rights Foundation, 2005). At present these institutions can only cater for about 1 140 students with disabilities⁶⁰ which amounts to less than 10 % of the total estimated number of children with disabilities in Albania (*idem.*). The real figure is possibly closer to 5 % as the number of children with severe disabilities in Albania is estimated to be at least twice the number reported in official sources.⁶¹

Teachers, parents of disadvantaged students and DPO/NGO workers participating in this research identified a number of additional barriers to inclusive education, the majority of which were also recognised by local and central education authorities. As was reported in previous research (Closs et al, 2003), these barriers include: the long distances children must travel to school, especially in the distant rural and mountainous parts of the country; the poor road infrastructure in these areas that are especially unfavourable to children with physical disabilities; the lack of openness of schools and communities towards the diversity of pupils; and, perhaps most importantly, the lack of teacher expertise in planning and providing for students with SEN, including the gifted and talented.

4.4 Policies Relevant for Teacher Preparation and Development

Teachers in Albania are trained at the Universities of Tirana, Elbasan, Korça, Vlora, Shkodër, Durrës and Gjirokastër and the Academy of Sports. The Law on Higher Education⁶² recognises five types of higher education institutions: universities, academies, professional colleges, higher schools and inter-university centres. University faculties and teacher training departments are responsible for organising and compiling the syllabi. The main activity of these institutions is the theoretical and practical preparation of students in professional teaching skills. Research is a secondary activity and usually receives little financial support or systematic application.

The university system of teacher education and training is currently a 4-year programme (equivalent to the bachelor level) but is gradually changing to the 3+2 Bologna system. This does not currently cater for

⁵⁹ Rashid and Dorabawila (1999) note that basic education student dropout rate may not be due just to economic factors but rather to a perceived lack of the relevance of basic education to daily life.

⁶⁰ As reported in the Strategy on EFA/FTI, 2004.

⁶¹ 12,000 – 24,000 children in the severe end of the spectrum of disabilities as estimated in Closs *et al.* in 'I Am Like You' an investigation in the position of children with disabilities in Albania, 2003.

⁶² Ligji per Arsimin e Larte ne Republiken e Shqipërisë, no. 9741 date 21.5.2007 (changed by Law 9832 date 12.11.2007).

teachers for children aged 0-3 years old nor does it provide psycho-pedagogical education for teachers of professional subjects in the higher professional levels of the education system. Pre-school educators and primary grade teachers (elementary school, grades 1-5) are trained within a single department in each of the universities of Elbasan, Korça, Vlorë, Durrës and Gjirokastër, commonly known as the 'Lower Grade Cycle' department. Teachers of the upper primary cycle (grades 6-9) and high schools (grades 10-12 under the recently changed system) are trained in the universities of Elbasan, Korça, Vlorë, Gjirokastër and Shkodër.

Newly graduated high school teachers automatically obtain the title of teacher after they gain their fourth level qualification (this is the basic level).⁶³ Under the 'qualification by experience system, teachers start work once they are hired by the Regional Directorates of Education and Offices of Education⁶⁴ in accordance with the procedures of the Labour Code. They may then be considered for full certification after five years of experience in teaching, passing on to the third level of qualification. Another five years of experience (10 years of work) may move them on to a second level and then to a first level of qualification after 20 years. Teachers are entitled to a salary increment for each level of certification achieved.

In-service training leads to no increase in salary and is not formally compulsory although teachers attend seminars and workshops even when they are not directly interested, usually either because the content is relevant to their work or because of the specialist knowledge of the trainer. Many teachers would be reluctant to report that they often only attend because they are 'requested' to do so by their superiors. The national state training system provides in-service teacher training to help staff: apply changes in the curricula for different subjects; introduce new subjects in school; improve the teaching process through methods and strategies; develop cross-curricular and extra-curricular knowledge; and deal with other issues. As some of the training activities organised by government agencies are shared with or supported by NGOs or INGOs, teachers may be exposed to topics such as critical thinking, human rights, democratic education, global and European civilisation, gender and disability issues, inclusive education, health care or environmental awareness.

The Institute of Curricula and Training (ICT) is the only government agency responsible for providing in-service teacher training at a national level. At county and district level, legislation recognises the Regional Directorates of Education and Offices of Education as responsible for managing teacher-training activities.⁶⁵ However, local and school authorities participating in this research acknowledged that the majority of inclusion-related training is actually provided by a wide range of non-profit organisations through agreements with either the ICT or the authorities. The workshops provided jointly by the ICT and local authorities several times a year generally cater for a relatively low number of teachers and cannot cover the wide variety of issues required.

Over the last few years, the ICT has launched a network of trainers to support training policies at local levels. ICT specialists are currently working on curricula based on areas of learning in order to orchestrate a gradual managed transition from the current style of didactic 'chalk and talk' whole-class teaching to more active student-centred approaches.

The entire salary system for public employees is funded by the national budget and salaries in the education system are set by decisions made by the Council of Ministers. Under this system, the salary is composed of a

⁶³ In accordance with the Labour Code (Law. No.7961, date 12.07.1995, changed by Law no.8085, date 13.03.1996, and Law no. 9125, date 29.07.2003) and other by-laws.

⁶⁴ MoES agencies at county and district level.

⁶⁵ The Law on Pre-University Education, the Normative Clause but also MoES guidelines and memoranda.

common basic component and additions to the salary. The basic salary level is determined in line with the educational qualifications (high school or university) of the employee. Seniority and additional qualifications may be considered for higher levels of remuneration. Other additions are based on a hierarchy where considerations include the level of the post held and the section of the education 'cycle' where the teacher works (lower primary, upper primary, secondary etc.).

As was stated above, in-service training programmes for teachers are neither compulsory nor accredited. There is currently no procedure or institution in place to conduct the accreditation of such programmes. NGO trainers are often qualified, but ICT trainers or those from local authorities and other government agencies often have official status (appointed to act as trainers) but no professional experience (no formal training as trainers). Nonetheless, much of the training they deliver is found useful by teachers as it is related to the subjects they teach. Meanwhile, from the perspective of local trainers, the in-service training system is in crisis. Many of them are employees of local education authorities but they are not provided with a precise job description. This often leads them to take on the role of trainer rather than training coordinator; the role really intended and needed.

The MoES has been planning reforms towards an inclusive system of education since 2008 based on the success of existing NGO-funded pilot projects and in order to comply with the commitments undertaken in various strategies. The main directions envisaged for the reform are: improving management of the education system; increasing participation in decision-making at the various levels; and devolution of some powers to schools. This is a difficult process that would require a complete overhaul of the traditional top-down concept of administration in order to improve management at all levels, installing contemporary mindsets and the practices characterised by performance-based management. The project also involves the development of performance standards for school directors, teachers, trainers and local authority specialists, and a code of ethics for teachers.

5. MAPPING TEACHER PREPARATION FOR INCLUSION

5.1 Pre-service Preparation

When asked about how much knowledge they had been given on the development of skills in inclusive education during their pre-service training, most teachers, not surprisingly, simply smiled or shrugged in disbelief. On reflection, however, some later mentioned a 'Child Development Psychology' unit. This element was also identified in the on-line survey responses as the single most relevant kind of knowledge provided to teachers, increasing their awareness of how children may mature and develop at different rates. However, many teachers were also taught that there are 'mentally incapable' or 'handicapped' children who are uneducable, while a small number of exceptions can 'get something' out of schooling and should therefore be educated in separate schools with special means.

Many teachers described studies in teacher-training faculties that followed a rigid pattern and some of the younger teachers confirmed this is still widely the case. Trainee teachers were taught about specific subjects that they would later teach to pupils, with the emphasis on Mathematics and Albanian Language and Literature, followed mainly by Physics, Chemistry, History, Geography and Biology. Didactics and Pedagogy were also taught as specific subjects to enhance knowledge and develop teacher skills on transmitting knowledge to students and assessing pupil achievement. The classes they attended and those they taught were divided in two sections. In the first section, the students listened to the teacher and occasionally took notes, and in the second, students were required to reproduce the lesson they had been taught in the previous class. This system left little or no room for them to adjust their teaching to the specific needs of any students unable to grasp the meaning of the concepts being delivered. These students would inevitably fall behind, and in addition to their failure being marked accordingly, they would become the objects of ridicule and scorn for other students and often suffer disciplinary action from both teachers and parents.

The remarks made by teacher fall into two sets broad categories: those provided by teachers trained before the late 1990s and from those who graduated within the last decade. During the nineties the curricula of pre-service teacher education in almost all higher education institutions in Albania started to include Special Educational Needs (SEN) as a separate subject or set of modules within a broader discipline, on an obligatory or optional basis. Although inclusive education is still a new concept, even for some of the teacher educators who were interviewed during this research, teachers graduating since the late nineties reported some level of input on the issue. This included knowledge of disabilities and how some pupils with SEN can be educated in mainstream schools while others, whose needs cannot be met by the school, can be educated in special schools. According to these teachers, this approach emphasises the need for all mainstream students including those with SEN to be able to absorb the lesson content and reproduce it to a satisfactory level.

Teaching staff at teacher training institutions interviewed during this research are aware of the need for a different approach to integrate students with SEN and to re-integrate Roma students and other 'dropouts' to the mainstream. However, researchers found two university SEN departments in the process of closing. Several reasons were given for this in the University of Elbasan, ranging from the lack of student interest to a shortage of specialised teaching staff, and no plans had been made of how to deliver SEN or inclusion-specific knowledge and skills to the current and future cohorts of students. In another university in Vlora, a Department of Special Pedagogy was established about six years ago in collaboration with a Western European university, but the future of the programme was uncertain. The mainstreaming of students with a disability is already supported by the Normative Clause on the 9-year compulsory education system, and, if there is to be

any possibility of success, Albanian higher education institutions must be obliged to equip student teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills. The closure of teacher training faculty departments is an unjustifiable and incoherent act in such a context.

The lack of student teacher interest in SEN courses may be due to a range of causes not covered in detail by this research. Nonetheless, when asked about the relevance of the content of these courses, and that of other courses introduced recently to encourage the development of inclusive practices at school, the more recent graduates identified that they had learned the following:

- awareness that diversity is more widespread among students than they initially thought
- every child has the right to develop and learn in a school that is near their home, and this right is specifically included in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- some basic knowledge of the various disabilities and how they influence the learning processes of a child on graduating
- basic knowledge on gross and fine motor development in children and how to take this into consideration when teaching students to write, sit still or play
- parents of all children can provide major input that can be used to facilitate teaching, and they should therefore be viewed as allies
- new methodologies of teaching, in some cases including non-traditional and interactive methodologies
- organising teaching through play and games can be more attractive to pupils and can increase attention in class and levels of achievement
- how to be constructively critical about pupils and colleagues in order to be supportive and encourage learning

These responses clearly show that attempts to introduce new skills-oriented subjects in some of the teacher training faculties have produced knowledge that is relevant and appreciated by newly practicing teachers. This is despite the lack of long-term vision amongst many faculty staff as reported by teacher educators in favour of non-traditional teaching. Students in teacher education universities support this view and list newly introduced subjects such as 'Gender Studies' or 'Social Ethics' among their favourite and most interesting classes.

Teachers cited the need to further develop the skills and knowledge units listed above. They also provided a list of recommendations they believed would help fill the gaps left by inadequate pre-service education and provide an immediate response to the new reality facing Albanian schools. The following suggestions from practicing teachers were recorded as advice for future teachers and the staff of teacher training faculties and are far from exhaustive:

- the (teacher training) faculties should impart sufficient and comprehensive knowledge on various forms of disabilities and learning disorders
- future teachers should be taught how to respond to health emergencies; they need to know how to provide first aid (e.g. for a student with epilepsy) without having to wait for the paramedics or nurses to arrive

- greater attention should be paid to behaviour management especially with pupils in the upper grades, future teachers should be taught approaches to positive discipline in the faculties
- organisation of student-centred classes needs further support especially in most single-subject classes (in the upper primary grades), because the current rigid curriculum does not allow for this and students with SEN start to fail at this stage
- teachers are asked to promote talented students in schools, but they have not been taught how to identify talent or how to work with such students. The topic of gifted and talented pupils should be included in pre-service teacher education
- future teachers must learn the skills for the individualised testing of attainment
- future teachers must learn about inclusive education and what this means for the school, the teacher and the student
- faculty courses should train student teachers in short and long term planning, how to deliver classes and how to set individual and group objectives
- teachers need to develop advanced personal communication skills in order to work with both students and parents
- teachers must be conscious of their specific role and know how to represent that role when working in multi-disciplinary groups with other professionals (social workers, psychologists and different therapists) in developing and implementing IEPs, etc.
- student teachers are expected to be computer and internet literate but the faculties do not offer any courses on this. Training of this kind would improve their opportunities for learning while training and for professional development after they start work
- teachers in Gjirokaster⁶⁶ mentioned that the number of emigrants returning temporarily or permanently to Albania is creating a need for their children to be taught Albanian as a second language; an entirely new area of responsibility

Parents and community members echoed teacher concerns, highlighting the inadequacy of teacher knowledge and preparation for coping with diversity in classrooms, especially in the case of students with SEN. Although their perceptions are not articulated in sufficient detail to identify specific competences, they stress the importance of the teacher ability to adapt their teaching style in order to address specific issues for children with SEN. In addition, parents would like more interaction with teachers, especially in terms of contact initiated by teachers. Such contact would be especially important in issues such as the development of individualised education plans and strategies where mutual collaboration on the basis of respect and appreciation of parental and teacher contributions. One parent provided the following sympathetic view of the lack of teacher ability in this area: "It's not (the teachers') fault that they are not taught these things at school."

Teacher educators stated that most of the aspects of teaching and values presented to focus groups in the list of teacher competences had already been approved by them and were already included in their teacher

⁶⁶ A southern Albanian town bordering Greece, with a high rate of seasonal population mobility due to emigration.

training programmes, although not specifically with an inclusion perspective. Responses to the survey questions supported this statement as 11 of the 17 teacher educators stated these items were covered in their courses.

However, only 6 of the 16 respondent student teachers agreed, and most were unable to state with certainty whether their programme had included such aspects and aims.

The teacher educators claimed that most of the topics listed in the survey as being conducive to inclusive education (Annex 3) already formed part of their study programmes. However, both the student teachers and recently qualified practicing teachers stated only the child-centred approach and interactive and collaborative learning had actually been covered during training.

While the teacher educators tended to claim that a variety of learning opportunities for inclusive education were provided to students, most of the student teachers stated this consisted merely of discussion of the issue.

Meanwhile, learning opportunities such as: participation in group projects; response to teacher requests for critical feedback; feedback on teaching practice performance; collaborative group work; opportunities to challenge assumptions and preconceptions; and networking opportunities, seem to be extremely rare in all teacher education programmes in Albanian universities. This situation was recognised by both teacher educators and student teachers, but especially by the latter.

Most teacher educators recognise the benefit of the inclusion of pupils with SEN in regular classes as a source of learning about diversity and tolerance for all students. However, student teachers score higher on this belief than do teacher educators.

Most teacher educators rate teacher ability to improve the learning of all students and the tailoring of strategies to student needs as being of average importance in their programmes. They also rate the level to which these competences are actually acquired during teacher education programme as average. The student teachers, however, rate these competences as more relevant than do the teacher educators but state that they are not sufficiently acquired during their teacher education programmes.

Both teacher educators and student teachers agree on the importance of work with support staff to ensure inclusion. They also have high regard for: teacher competences for interpersonal relationships with students and their families; recognizing and respecting cultural and individual differences; understanding different values held by students and their families; awareness of their own preconceptions and value stances; ability to recognise the specific needs of students; encouraging intercultural respect and understanding among pupils; and maintaining high expectations regardless of student background. However, while teacher educators see these competences being acquired at an average or above average level in teacher education programmes, student teachers tend to respond less positively, indicating that their grasp of the competences is not secure.

Despite some disagreement on the representation and grasp of specific inclusive education competences in teacher education programmes and the level of acquisition by student teachers, almost all survey participants agreed on a number of other apparently crucial areas. Teacher training institutions are accepting student teachers with low levels of academic and other competences from their previous education, especially at the general high school level. There has been falling student interest in pursuing teacher training over the last 20 years; a situation explained by both teacher educators and practicing teachers as an outcome of the low pay and deteriorating social status of the teacher as an educator and community leader. Unsurprisingly, a recent survey (Albania Institute for Development, Research and Alternatives, 2009) of public perceptions of

corruption among public employees in Albania rated teachers at 48 points on a scale of 100.⁶⁷ Other factors that come to bear on the poor level of teacher preparation include the poor level of facilities and accommodation in some teacher training institutions and the lack of teaching technology and resources.

School teachers also strongly asserted that existing curricula for student teachers fall far short of preparing them for inclusive schools. In their view, the curricula concentrate on content rather than skills and values. The courses are very intensive and rigid, and do not allow the prospective teachers to reach their full potential.

“UNIVERSITIES PRODUCE VERY POOR TEACHERS NOWADAYS. THEY DON’T EVEN HAVE QUALIFICATIONS IN THE SUBJECTS THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO TEACH, LET ALONE COMPETENCES TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ATMOSPHERE IN THE CLASSROOM. ONE OF THE STUDENT TEACHERS ASSIGNED TO ME ON TEACHING-PRACTICE IN MY CLASSROOM COULDN’T EVEN POINT TO WHERE AFRICA IS ON THE MAP AFTER HAVING TOLD PUPILS THAT THERE ARE 9 CONTINENTS IN THE WORLD!!!”

(Experienced primary school teacher in a small town)

For their part, the student teachers blame the system:

“TEACHER EDUCATORS ARE NOT QUALIFIED FOR THE JOB. ON TOP OF THIS, TOO MANY STUDENTS GRADUATE AND COMPETE FOR VERY FEW TEACHING POSITIONS, AND THERE IS CORRUPTION IN BOTH ENROLMENT AND THE EMPLOYMENT PROCESS AFTERWARDS. DIPLOMAS CAN BE BOUGHT AND SOLD, AND JOBS CAN TOO.”

(Third year student teacher)

The mentoring system established during student teaching practices does not seem not to work well either. Teachers described many cases similar to the one cited above when student teachers show a very low level of preparation, lack of interest and empathy towards pupils. According to them: teacher mentors from the universities barely monitor their students at all; teaching practice hours are insufficient and poorly distributed across three or four years of studies; and the mismanagement of the few hours actually allocated is the most worrying aspect of the system.

5.2 In-service Preparation

There has been little discussion of the concept of inclusion and the alternative curriculum within relevant government agencies in Albania. As far as the GoA is concerned, the EFA goals of 100% enrolment⁶⁸ and higher levels of schooling completion in basic education must be achieved, and this cannot be done without appropriate provision for those students who do not attend or drop out; mostly Roma children and students with disabilities. The MoES has been made aware of this need and is exploring ways to adapt curriculum content to be more culturally sensitive, inclusive and tolerant towards disadvantaged students.⁶⁹

Effective curriculum delivery requires teachers to be equipped with the necessary competences. Teachers affirm that the vast majority of the skills they have found useful in addressing the increasing numbers of students with SEN in their classes have been acquired through in-service training provided largely by INGOs, NGOs and DPOs.

⁶⁷ Where customs officials were ranked as the most corrupt at 84.3 points.

⁶⁸ By 2015, according to the Strategy on EFA/FTI, 2004.

⁶⁹ As expressed in the National Strategy on People with Disabilities.

The list of skills and knowledge acquired in this way is too extensive to be fully included in this report. Teachers and in-service training providers⁷⁰ particularly valued programmes focussed on the following items: individualised planning; group and individual teaching based on varying student-centred teaching methodologies;⁷¹ critical reading and writing; active and interactive learning; how to avoid or reduce the phenomenon of 'hidden dropouts'; recognition of basic human rights especially the right of all children, regardless of differences, to learn and be educated in mainstream schools; increased confidence in the educability of children with SEN; use of diversified testing methods to assess attainment; patient and enduring communication with pupils with SEN and their parents; understanding and empathy towards parents resistant to cooperation with the school; providing differentiated attention and teaching styles; responding to basic learning needs associated with mild and moderate forms of disabilities; encouraging and stimulating all student teachers to accept, plan and provide for diversity (especially students with disabilities); gender issues and education; organisation of classes in non-traditional ways; adopting non-discriminatory language and behaviour towards students with disabilities and Roma and Gypsy students; developing knowledge and understanding of the culture of Roma communities;⁷² modelling open and accepting behaviour towards Roma and Gypsy students and their parents; planning extra-curricular activities to encourage all students; and very many more.

The ICT is also regarded as an important training provider although inclusive competences are not its greatest strength. Teachers were particularly positive about a training module on setting 3-level objectives in class (dividing specific class objectives into three levels – below average, average and above average) though many teachers acknowledged that they had already acquired skills for setting class and individual objectives through training from NGOs. One even more popular professional development programme involved the setting of small and gradually increasing objectives for use in IEPs. Training on how to recognise additional learning needs and adopt suitable language with students with disabilities were widely recognised as beneficial too.

International donor agencies have made significant investments in teacher training with regard to inclusive education, attempting not only involve the government and encourage it to embrace the concept more enthusiastically but also to see the inclusion agenda reflected in both pre-service and in-service teacher education. At the institutional level, the ICT has not been significantly involved in this drive towards inclusive education for various reasons often beyond its control despite the individual commitment and engagement of a number of ICT experts.

Save the Children in Albania (SCiA) remains the principal government partner in implementing the inclusive education agenda. Although it is gradually reducing support, SCiA⁷³ has been highly active in modelling and promoting inclusive education interventions with local NGO and DPO partners such as MEDPAK, Help the Life and ADRF since 2003. SCiA employs a twin-track approach to education: it pilots inclusive education projects in 32 schools in six areas of the country (Tirana, Berat, Librazhd, Gjirokastër, Korça and Vlora) while at the same time supporting a cascade-system of in-service teacher training to about 9 100 teachers in 400 schools throughout all 13 regions of the country.⁷⁴ Teachers, school principals, social workers and educational psychologists are trained to improve their teaching and classroom management skills through topics such as

⁷⁰ The majority of them from the NGO sector.

⁷¹ Especially through the 'Step by Step' method.

⁷² In Tirana, Elbasan and Gjirokaster only.

⁷³ www.scalbania.org

⁷⁴ In 2008 alone (Save the Children, Albania Programme 2009 Annual Plan).

student-centred methodologies, IEPs for students with SEN and Roma children. Meanwhile, schools are supported in developing regular school plans focused on the principles of inclusion and child participation.

UNICEF Albania was amongst the first international organisations to draw attention to inclusive education in the country through a study conducted in 2001 followed by a two-year project (2001–2003) to increase teacher skills on inclusion. UNICEF currently makes a limited contribution to teacher training, but is focused on new teaching and learning strategies such as interactive and student-centred methodologies to prevent student marginalisation and dropout. A total of 200 teachers were trained on these strategies, leading to improved performance in Mathematics and Reading for 1 500 students with learning difficulties.⁷⁵

World Vision Albania⁷⁶ has recently become involved and plans to increase country-wide contributions to teacher training in inclusive education with a focus on the education of students with disabilities. Other important local non-profit organizations providing training on inclusion include MEDPAK,⁷⁷ Help the Life,⁷⁸ ADRF⁷⁹ and the Centre for Democratic Education.⁸⁰

Training seminars and workshops are not the only forms of in-service training from which teachers benefit. Teachers refer to a number of publications focusing on: inclusive education; disability; gender issues; classroom management; child participation and student school councils; positive discipline; early childhood development; and communication skills. They specifically cite the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Portage Guide to Early Education (a psycho-pedagogical methodology for working with early years children with SEN), as well as subject-specific publications. These publications are mostly provided by NGOs, but also by teacher training university faculties, the ICT and MoES.

One of these publications, a teacher's manual (ILO/IPEC, 2002) developed with the support of ILO/IPEC, outlines the special teacher competences required for second-chance education. The Education Equity and Excellence Programme (EEE-P) has a significant component on improving the quality of teaching with activities to support inclusive education. For example, the proposed reform of current teaching and learning practices under the EEE-P operates on a student-centred and activity-based approach.

Some teachers, although not many, refer to the internet as a source of useful knowledge especially in learning how to manage aggressive behaviour in the classroom.⁸¹ Issues of bullying and aggressive behaviour are not well documented and are also not addressed by pre-service or in-service training programmes.

Many teachers and head teachers also refer to working with NGO, INGO and DPO staff and some external SEN specialists as valuable experiences that contributed to their professional growth.

Representatives of local government authorities who participated in this research indicated some good practices relevant to the promotion of inclusive education, where they became party to the implementation. These projects involved extensive in-service teacher training and were mainly implemented (or are being implemented) with the support of international agencies in central and southern Albania. In 2006, a project funded jointly by the municipality of Durres and UNDP worked with university teachers to try and increase the

⁷⁵ http://www.unicef.org/albania/education_667.html

⁷⁶ http://meero.worldvision.org/funding_ops_details.php?projectId=149

⁷⁷ <http://www.medpak.org/>

⁷⁸ <http://helpthelife.org/ProgramInfo.aspx?id=490f55dd-05d6-45df-bf83-9ceaa017548e>

⁷⁹ <http://www.adrf.org.al/>

⁸⁰ <http://www.cde-ct.org/>

⁸¹ In Tirana and Gjirokaster mostly.

enrolment and attendance rates in one school in an area settled by internal migrants from the disadvantaged rural areas in the north-western part of the country in recent years. Some success was achieved through teacher training combined with community development activities but the project was suspended due to a shortage of funds.

Teachers state that a serious commitment is required from the education authorities before they can develop competences for inclusion further and actively take part in relevant training workshops. They would require both recognition and reward for their enhanced skills and efforts through a career progression scheme and remuneration they believe should be funded by the Government. Additionally, teachers want their voices and concerns heard in school and their opinions considered in decisions that concern them and their work. Many teachers recognise experience-sharing activities between different schools in various parts of the country to be comprehensive and valuable learning resources. Their belief in lifelong learning means they would be open to opportunities to attend training and experience-sharing events. They firmly believe that they should be given greater freedom to adapt the rigid and centralised curriculum and programmes to the individual needs of teachers and their students.

According to teachers, the central education authorities should coordinate teacher development opportunities from all sources more coherently and better in order to keep pace with the NGOs which, quite often, deliver content that, is not always supported by relevant MoE guidelines and decrees, even though it is often good and helpful.

In spite of the variety of training topics, in-service teacher preparation is mainly provided through formal training workshops. Developing skills and spreading relevant new knowledge among teachers should be seen an integral part of increasing their disposition. Building dispositions requires closer collaboration with parents, colleagues and community workers in recognition that competences are better constructed and expertise accumulated by observation, sharing and practice.

Some instances were reported of parents, teachers and local DPO workers meeting to coordinate efforts for better understanding of and provision for students with learning support needs.⁸² These sessions were found to be developmental for all concerned and very effective, but this type of multi-professional-parent meetings cannot be held very often as they are expensive. Meanwhile, most parents said teachers would only ask to meet with them once a week although parents in smaller communities meet teachers less formally and sometimes communicate one or several times each day. They use these informal meetings to talk about the health, wellbeing and learning achievements of students along with their grades, any difficulties they have, and sometimes the student IEP.⁸³ Many parents said these brief informal individual meetings can often be much more informative and useful than the weekly or bi-monthly open parent meetings schools generally organise in line with the prevailing traditionalism of their organisation:

"IT'S NOT EASY FOR US, AS PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, TO HAVE TO DISCUSS ISSUES ABOUT OUR CHILDREN OPENLY IN FRONT OF ALL OTHER PARENTS."

(Parent of a student with disabilities in a small town)

According to parents, teachers should be more proactive in working with parents. Cooperation should not only be initiated by parents asking about their children, the school should seek them out. In one case, the

⁸² In Librazhd.

⁸³ This was only mentioned in Berat, Gjirokaster and Tirana.

persistence of a parent and cooperation between the local education authority, the school and Save the Children led to funding being allocated from the capital for specialised support for the child.⁸⁴ Other cases of similar approaches were also reported.

"THE NEW TEACHER IN GRADE 2 PLACED MY SON, WHO HAS COGNITIVE ISSUES DUE TO DIFFICULTIES AT BIRTH, IN THE BACK ROW [OF SEATS]. I NOTICED THAT MY SON WASN'T MAKING ANY PROGRESS AT SCHOOL AND WAS BULLIED BY THE OTHER CLASSMATES SITTING IN THE BACK ROW. YOU KNOW, THEY MOSTLY SIT THE POOR PERFORMERS IN THE BACK ROW. I TALKED TO THE TEACHER BUT ALTHOUGH SHE PROMISED, SHE DIDN'T MOVE HIM TO ANOTHER BENCH. SO I HAD TO TALK TO THE HEADMASTER. HE RECEIVED ME VERY WELL AND THE ISSUE WAS RESOLVED. I AM ALSO HAPPY BECAUSE THE TEACHER DID NOT HAVE ANY HARD FEELINGS AFTER I TALKED TO THE HEADMASTER. MY SON IS NOW SITTING IN THE FRONT ROW AND MAKING SOME PROGRESS. THIS WAY IT IS ALSO EASIER FOR THE TEACHER TO PAY MORE ATTENTION TO HIS SPECIFIC NEEDS."

(Parent of a student with SEN attending primary school in a small town)

The view of parents of students with disabilities seems to differ from that of other parents with regard to extracurricular activities organised at school. According to these parents, their children start hating school when they attend mainstream schools because 'it is not fun' for them. They have noticed that the children cheer up and are happy for many days after school excursions and that they learn a lot of other interesting on these outings that they are not taught in school. Other parents have expectations more in terms of academic knowledge. Nonetheless, teachers recognise that the planning and implementation of extracurricular activities is not given due weight in either pre-service or in-service training; an element also reflected in schools. Some sessions on the planning of extracurricular activities have been delivered through a combination of NGO and ICT provision, but these activities are often pushed out by regular classes in order to accommodate the densely packed compulsory teaching programme.

In Albania, although favourable legislation is generally in place, the responses provided in this section clearly demonstrate that while inclusive education is not an unknown concept to most participants, it is not fully addressed in pre-service teacher education programmes or sufficiently implemented and coordinated in in-service teacher education. Furthermore, understanding of inclusive education in the country tends to be polarised and perceived either in very broadest terms of access and quality, or the narrowest understanding in terms of provision for the individual participation of students with disabilities. This confusion in itself urgently warrants further investigation.

⁸⁴ Gjirokaster.

6. IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Policy Makers

The recommendations in this subsection are a combination of direct suggestions from the policy-maker participants and less direct outcomes resulting from consideration of responses from the participants in this study.

The development of inclusive education practices requires concerted efforts and initiatives with the participation of all stakeholders. The government has a role to play in coordinating training and other services provided by government and non-governmental institutions, international agencies, teacher-training institutions, schools and communities. This would ensure that all parts of the puzzle enrich and complement each other in aiming for a common goal. The lead role could be taken by the ICT or an MoES-dependant commission could be set up to provide coordination and oversee implementation in the longer term.

Due priority should be given to the process of issuing a new or revised Normative Clause reflecting stakeholder suggestions. This should be finalised and issued to schools immediately to help open up the school system to diversity in line with government commitments and international practice. Similarly, in the short term, a new Law on Education should reflect national priorities in this area, drawing upon the Social Inclusion Strategy amongst others.

The systems for pre-service and in-service teacher training must be guided by a clear vision and policies on the basis of realistic assessments of needs, and must create a climate for competition between providers. The links between these two systems should be reinforced with the government encouraging and supporting the progressive involvement of state-funded teacher education university faculties in in-service and in pre-service training.

There has been almost no significant research to analyse and document the inclusive practices of teachers and the classroom methodologies used in Albania. As the teacher is currently at the centre of educational reform, in the short term, the government should fund this research in the state-funded universities in order to improve the quality of teacher training in both pre-service and in-service teaching systems.

The roles and responsibilities of the ICT should be strengthened and it should be guided by a clear vision on inclusive education. This vision must be reflected throughout all the objectives of this institution from the development of new curricula to the coordination and provision of training. In this regard, the compulsory education curricula should demonstrate awareness of all groups of people in the country, especially those vulnerable to discrimination and marginalisation. New curricula and training frameworks must be skills and values-oriented, and flexible for the teacher and trainer as well as the student and trainee. Such curricula should include provision of knowledge on vocational and career development amongst other matters.

The MoES and the ICT should set up a system of accreditation for in-service teacher training qualifications immediately. This system, linked to career progression and remuneration, should be continuously updated in order to motivate and encourage teachers and school managers.

6.2 Teacher Trainers and Educators

The recommendations in this subsection derive mainly but not entirely from the direct suggestions provided by teacher trainers and educators and NGO workers mainly involved in in-service training.

6.2.1 Pre service

The teacher training curricula currently lack emphasis on teacher competences pertinent to the development of inclusive education practices and these should gradually be enriched with modules on social inclusion, social justice, intercultural education, linguistic diversity, special needs education, gender equality, religious diversity, and a range of other subjects which are currently missing.

Student teacher admission, enrolment, participation and evaluation criteria should be scrutinised with care in order to create competitive conditions for the development of expertise among students and staff. Furthermore, the preparation of teachers should respond to market demand in order to avoid artificial inflation and to prevent corruption. The government could oversee the process in collaboration with the universities by rapidly introducing a strict set of quality assurance criteria for the teacher preparation faculties.

The selection of subjects and design of syllabi should be conducted in such a way that teacher educators are able to engage in a process of dialogue and brainstorming with student teachers. Knowledge construction should be based on a clear and shared vision of inclusive education on the part of both parties. Similarly, in the short-term, the government could enforce quality assurance and diversify the funding base for the state-run universities in accordance with the criteria being met.

Discussion in classes and individual or small group discussions with teachers is a good practice that supports teacher preparation for inclusive education. However, teacher educators must: use a variety of approaches in the programme, start giving emphasis to participation in group projects; provide feedback on teaching practice performance; set up collaborative group work; offer students opportunities to challenge assumptions and preconceptions; and provide them with networking opportunities.

Teacher educators should be open and creative in identifying and building programmes in ways that allow the competences relevant for inclusive education to be acquired by students; such as meeting student needs through the tailoring of individual strategies. The universities should encourage this creativity and set up a system to promote this within their institutions. This can be achieved by organizing capacity building and sharing events where teacher educators are invited to participate in the inclusive education debate with other teachers and education professionals.

Student teachers only seem to make contact with their future workplaces during their teaching-practices. It is therefore important that this experience of pre-entry into the profession is given due weight in the overall programme, and it must be monitored properly with constructive evaluations being fed back to student teachers.

6.2.2 In-service

Expertise is gradually evolving in the delivery of good models in inclusive education, and these experiences should be considered the basis for practice-oriented teacher development.

Local education authority specialists should be enabled to act as training coordinators rather than of expert trainer for training events; they should be aiming to locate expertise and make this available to schools and

communities. The system of regional training coordinators should be developed and rapidly enacted in order to help coordinate the distribution, relevance and quality of in-service training delivery.

The ICT should cooperate proactively and share expertise with teacher training universities in developing and implementing teacher training curricula focussed on the development of teacher competences relevant to inclusive education. The training catalogues and frameworks developed in this regard should include and require compulsory use of inclusive education modules.

Provision of in-service training should integrate a variety of opportunities; it should encourage and provide for the sharing of practical experiences and best practice models.

In the medium term, the ICT and the MoES should collaborate in developing and issuing inclusive education teacher standards and policy guidelines for schools to use in recruiting and assessing staff. They should also provide training opportunities for teachers.

6.3 Teachers

These recommendations are largely based on the best inclusive practice already in the country, as identified and endorsed in the course of this research. Direct suggestions made by participants and teachers were reformulated and included as far as possible.

Teachers in compulsory education should reflect upon their own preconceptions in relation to diversity, recognise and identify its strengths and potential, and celebrate its richness. This process must be encouraged and facilitated by the local education authorities in collaboration with school head-teachers. In order to do this, school head-teachers should be supported, trained and supervised in establishing sustainable school structures, with operational decision-making boards that respect the strengths of staff and students. They should lobby the government for the support they need to respond to the changing reality and the demands presented by reforms. Schools could benefit greatly from participation and engagement in regional and country-wide networks for sharing experiences.

The appointment of new teachers and promotion of existing staff should be based on criteria specifying open-mindedness and the ability to cooperate with colleagues, students and parents. Teachers should recognise parents as their allies in providing feasible education solutions for all students regardless of ability, educational or social restrictions. Furthermore, schools should approve and introduce measures to guarantee the equality of education provision and to actively fight discrimination among students and staff.

Teachers need to plan and teach in accordance with the abilities of each student and their specific additional support needs. They must create IEPs based on the learning abilities and needs of individual students by working with a larger team within the school, including parents. This process should be included within the school plans and in the job descriptions of head-teachers.

Teachers should deliver classes in the awareness that they should reach out to all students, particularly those with significant special or additional support needs, and make use of a range of strategies both inside the classroom and out. They should apply student-centred and result-oriented teaching methods. They should initiate extracurricular activities where students learn by doing. The local education authorities should give due weighting to this in their training and in quality assurance and inspection frameworks.

Teaching staff should ensure a sustainable student support system is created throughout all levels of the school. This can be achieved by introducing learning support or teaching assistants in the schools alongside adaptable

teaching styles and techniques, especially in delivery of the 'natural sciences' (such as Mathematics, Chemistry, etc.) in the higher grades.

Finally, they should engage parents, relate to them, share information with them and ask for their assistance. They should practice patience with both students and their parents and organise individual and specific rather than generic meetings with parents as often as they can. School head-teachers and school boards should ensure that parental participation is not taken for granted in school decision-making.

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ANNEX 1 | GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Additional support needs – the need of children and young people for extra support to benefit from school education at any time, for any reason (e. g. very able students; students whose education is disrupted by illness, or by being a refugee; students with a chaotic home life; bilingual learners, etc.).

In-service teacher training - education and training activities engaged in by primary and secondary school teachers and heads following their initial professional certification, and intended mainly or exclusively to improve their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes in order for them to educate students more effectively.

Mentor teacher - a teacher who is qualified, promoted or assigned to monitor student teachers while they visit schools for practice.

Pre-school education - education in pre-school institutions or schools that precedes primary education and serves as preparation for this.

Pre-service teacher education - education that prospective teachers are requested to undergo in order to qualify for entry into teaching, including both programmes specifically designed for future teachers and those programmes in where students study a disciplinary area that is an equivalent of to a school subject.

Primary education - education in primary schools including lower years in which classes are taught in all subject areas by a class teacher and upper years of primary schooling where different teachers teach different subject areas. *Secondary education* - post-primary education in any academic or vocational secondary school, academic or vocational.

Special educational needs - include students who have physical, sensory or cognitive or other specific disabilities or any combination of these. It might also include students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Student teacher - a student studying at a pre-serves service institution preparing primary class or subject teachers and secondary school teachers, both academic and vocational.

Teacher - overall term for those qualified to teach at any level of school, including pre-school teachers, primary class teachers, primary subject teachers and secondary school teachers.

Teacher educator - university professor or other college or higher education institution lecturer who teaches student teachers in pre-service education and who provides training for practicing teachers in primary and secondary schools.

ANNEX 2 | STRUCTURE OF THE ALBANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The public pre-university education system in Albania formally comprises three levels: pre-primary, primary and secondary. According to the Law on Pre-University Education, enrolment in the pre-primary system, formally known as pre-schools or kindergartens, starts with children aged between 3 and 6 years old. Pre-school enrolment and attendance is not mandatory. The GoA is making efforts to introduce one compulsory year (for students of age 5-6 years old) at this level.

The primary level of public schooling consists of grades 1-8 while the secondary level consists of grades 9-12 for general high schools, grades 9-10 for professional (vocational) schools and grades 9-13 and 11-13 for professional (vocational) technical schools. This system has been undergoing revision since 2005 in order for primary education to last 9 years and secondary general education a further 4 years although this is not yet formalised in the law and may change in the near future.

Article 8 of the above Law specifies that all children must enrol in schools providing compulsory education to last no less than 8 years from the age of 6. The new system being introduced by MoES since 2005, extends compulsory education to 9 years (of primary level schooling). In addition, all pupils are obliged to remain in compulsory education until the age of 16.⁸⁵ Under the newly introduced system, the compulsory public education system is composed of two levels formally referred to as the 'elementary cycle', or lower grades 1-4, and the 'higher cycle', or upper grades 4-8 or 5-9. Any compulsory education school may provide either full-time or part-time schooling. The latter is offered to citizens who are above the nominal age for compulsory education (16) but have not yet completed a 'full cycle' of education for various reasons.

According to Article 10 of the Law, persons from recognised ethnic minorities may be offered opportunities to attend compulsory education in their mother tongue either in separate schools or in separate schooling units within mainstream schools.⁸⁶ Provision of these opportunities, and the corresponding curricula, are regulated by procedures approved by the Council of Ministers.

Article 16 of the Law on Pre-University Education, further specified in Article 57 of the Normative Clause, indicates that special education is considered part of the public education system in Albania. The opening of special schools, where schooling with a 'reduced' curriculum lasts 9 years (instead of the 8 of mainstream schools) is dependent upon decisions by the MoES. Students in these schools are enrolled from the age of 6-10 years and may attend up to the age of 19.⁸⁷ The Normative Clause also recognises the education of these students in mainstream compulsory schools and other institutions when there are no special schools near to where the student lives. The Clause provides no further explanation on what these 'other institutions' may be, but this provision has often been interpreted and applied to mean both other residential (or non-residential) centres and home education.

Upon completion of compulsory education, students are free to enrol and attend secondary level schools which are also provided free of charge. The general high schools, provide four years of general education and deepening of the knowledge obtained in the compulsory levels of education. Students can enrol in secondary

⁸⁵ Failure to enroll and attend is punishable for the parents.

⁸⁶ Article 44/3 of the same Law specifies that the subjects of Albanian language and literature as well as the history and the geography of Albania have to be taught in Albanian language.

⁸⁷ Admission is done by a commission composed of the school head, two specialist teachers and a doctor.

level full-time schools up to the age of 16. Those beyond this age can enrol in the part-time system provided by most of these schools.

The first level of professional vocational public schools run for two to three years, as specified in Article 33 of the Law, to educate qualified workers in all specialities.⁸⁸ The second level, lasting 5 years after compulsory education or 3 years after grade 10 (of either general or professional high schools), educates technicians capable of working in or managing various enterprises. Secondary school enrolment is currently at a rate of 59%,⁸⁹ which is far lower than that of EU countries. The GoA aims to improve the figure, largely by increasing the number of years of compulsory education and by prioritising enrolment in vocational schools by improving the equity of its distribution in favour of students from poorer backgrounds.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ There is no mention of the types of 'specialities' covered by the Law.

⁸⁹ In 2005, according to the Social Inclusion Crosscutting Strategy 2008-2013.

⁹⁰ According to the same strategy, by 2013, 40% of students in secondary education will be attending vocational schools.

ANNEX 3 | TABLE OF COMPETENCES FOR INCLUSION

	basic	advanced
Personalised approach to learning	Improves competencies of all students	Innovates teaching to help all children learn
	Tailors teaching strategies to each child's needs	
	Uses various forms of assessment to help children learn and improve instruction	Designs and implements individual learning plans
	Works effectively with support staff	
	Adapts curricula to particular pupils	
	Guides and supports all learners	Pro-actively addresses inequities in materials, policies and so on
Understanding and respect of diversity (gender, socio-economic groups, ability/disability, culture, language, religion, learning styles)	Attends to students' cognitive development, and to their social-emotional and moral growth	
	Connects with students and their families at an interpersonal level	
	Recognises and respects cultural and individual differences	Uses students' backgrounds as scaffolding for teaching and learning
	Understands different values students and their families hold	
	Is aware of her own preconceptions and value stances	
	Recognises how her assumptions influence her teaching and relationships with different pupils	
Commitment to values of social inclusion	Recognises that knowledge is value-laden, constructed by the learner and reciprocal	Learns languages
	Is able to recognise pupils' special needs and provide for them or seek help	
	Is able to recognise gifted pupils' needs and provide appropriately for these	
	Encourages intercultural respect and understanding among pupils	
	Maintains high expectations regardless of students' background	Conducts research to advance understanding of education's contribution to social inclusion
	Treats all children with respect, affirms their worth and dignity	
	Believes in educability of every child	
	Helps all children develop into fully participating members of society	
	Understands the factors that create cohesion and exclusion in society	
	Understands the social and cultural dimensions of education	
	Understands the contribution of education to developing cohesive societies	
	Is familiar with conventions of the right of child and anti-discrimination	

Table developed on the basis of Tuning Teacher Education in the Western Balkans (Pantić, 2008) and European documents such as Common European Principles for Teachers' Competences and Qualifications (EC, 2005) and Improving Competences for the 21st Century (EC, 2008c).

ANNEX 4 | RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Design

The figure below reads horizontally to show how the theoretical assumptions adopted in the conceptual framework inform corresponding parts of the research design and methodologies.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND (THEORIES, BELIEFS)		RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS
<p>Competence is an integrated set of knowledge, skills and dispositions (Assumption 1)</p> <p>Teaching professionals themselves should be the main source of information in the process of defining teacher competence (Assumption 2)</p>		<p>The table of competences for inclusion developed in Pantić (2008) and key European documents were used for focus groups with teachers working in diverse environments</p>
<p>Social inclusion should be mainstreamed in all policies for teachers (general pluralism) and balanced with a targeted approach for children from marginalised/vulnerable groups (Assumption 3)</p> <p>Dispositions are predominantly socio-culturally developed (Assumption 4)</p> <p>Programmes based on beliefs about knowledge being value-laden and constructed by the learner are more inclusion-friendly (Assumption 5)</p> <p>Teacher Education programme experiences building teacher competences for inclusion include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - focus on inclusion-relevant topics in courses - provision of practical experiences - opportunities for interaction with families - opportunities for critical reflection - opportunities for discussion and dialogue <p>(Assumption 6)</p>		<p>The country team looked into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - policies and regulations - data from interviews with policy-makers, course designers, teacher educators, teachers, school principals, parents, community representatives and others <p>Online survey of initial Teacher Education programmes including questions on course units, practical experiences, opportunities for reflection and dialogue, the beliefs of teacher educators</p> <p>Catalogues and other sources of information about in-service programmes</p>
<p>Cross-country similarities are important for policy making (similar heritage, prospective European integration and relevant policies and practices) (Assumption 7)</p>		<p>Collection of examples of best practices from the Western Balkans</p>

Assumption 1: Competence is an integrated set of knowledge, skills and dispositions

The concept of competence is central to the three main questions addressed by this study:

- What teacher competences are needed for inclusive education in situations of social and cultural diversity?
- What is the current situation regarding the inputs, processes and outcomes of a) pre-service b) in-service teacher preparation for inclusive education?
- How can the situation regarding a) pre-service b) in-service teacher preparation for inclusive education be improved?

It is therefore necessary to outline the definition of competence as it is adopted in this study.

The concept of competence has gained popularity and credence in literature for teachers and teacher training on the international scale. Competence features in some key European documents for teachers (EC, 2005, 2008), some European projects on higher education curricula reform (Gonzales and Wagenaar, 2005) and recent studies in the Western Balkan region (Pantić, 2008; Rajović and Radulović, 2007; Zgaga, 2006).

Studies from the region invariably suggest that teacher training provides sound academic coverage of subjects and pedagogical knowledge on themes and issues, but that knowledge on how to identify and deal with problems in a real life setting is largely missing. Such expertise involves a combination of cognitive and practical knowledge and skills, but also values, motivation and attitudes - a combination widely referred to as 'competence' in the literature (Rajović and Radulović, 2007). It has been suggested that teacher education should be oriented toward the development of certain key competences that can help teachers perform effectively in their daily practice.

However, this competence-based model has been criticised for an overly narrow understanding of teacher expertise as the mere observable performance of daily teaching routines, downgrading the role of teacher to the simple technical implementation of policies and programmes. Critics argue that teaching is an ethical, normative profession that presupposes something of value is to be taught, whereupon they are bound to encounter problems that are not susceptible to resolution in value-neutral, technical terms (Carr, 1993). This is reflected in some of the most recent frameworks for competence (Tigelaar et al., 2004; Stoof et al., 2002) that adopt a view of competence that combines theoretical and practical knowledge and skills with attitudes and values.

This study adopts the broader view of competence as an integrated set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. A number of authors claim there is a specific body of knowledge necessary for working with 'special' children, and that these competences for inclusion need to be adequately covered during teacher preparation. Such training may involve developing an understanding of the socio-cultural factors that produce individual differences, or specialist knowledge on disability and children's learning needs, awareness of educational and social issues that can affect children's learning, and the like.

Another distinct stance operates on the basis that inclusion is not only about 'special' children, and that therefore teacher competence for inclusive educational practices should include skills relevant to improved teaching and learning for all, whilst reducing barriers to learning and participation.

This sort of approach could involve a multifaceted pedagogy recognising that: decisions taken to inform teaching should be based on children's individual characteristics; learning takes place outside school; learning must build on previous knowledge, individual and cultural experiences and interests (Florian and Rouse, 2009).

Teachers need to develop their dispositions alongside their knowledge and skills when considering competences for inclusion. Even the most comprehensive coverage of relevant themes is unlikely to anticipate every type of difficulty teachers might meet in their professional lives. Teachers undergoing preparation for inclusive education must be made to accept their responsibility to improve the learning and participation of all children, and be disposed to teach all learners equitably. Dispositions are tendencies for an individual to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs (Villegas, 2007). They involve teacher beliefs about the purposes of education, knowledge, learning and the educability of their students. The latter is of particular importance for inclusive education as this forms the basis of teacher expectations of their students. These expectations can lead them to treat students differently, resulting in positive or negative performance, aspirations and self-images dependent upon the original teacher assessments.

The definition of 'competence' as a combination of knowledge, skills and dispositions is reflected in the approach to both the definition of teacher competences and to the evaluation of existing policies and practices where all these aspects are featured.

Assumption 2: Changes in educational policies and practices fare better when they are congruent with teachers' beliefs about what is worthwhile in education

Growing research evidence states that the success of reforms introducing new practices such as inclusive education are critically dependent on their compatibility with teacher beliefs on the value of the change and transferability to daily teaching practices (Beijaard et al., 2000; Day, 2002; Day et al., 2007; Fives and Buehl, 2008; Wubbels 1995). Literature on change and innovation in education suggests that changes in education practices require careful consideration of the differences between the existing and desired models with a view to identifying consensual and/or competing forces in the change process. Changing systems are typically characterised by the coexistence of old and new 'states of affairs'. The emergent new state may have elements in common with the old one, and the wider apart the two states are initially, the more difficult the transition process will be (Anchan, Fullan and Polyzoi, 2003; Fullan 2007).

We must have a clear understanding of existing policies and practices of teacher preparation for inclusive education in the Western Balkan countries and of teachers' own perceptions of the competences they need and the help they require to develop these competences in order to identify the true extent of scope for improvement. An earlier study of teacher perceptions of competences conducted in the region (Pantić, 2008) reported that teachers attributed high importance to competences on equality and supporting the learning of all pupils. However, detailed study of examples of teacher preparation in the region showed current teacher preparation does not adequately cater for those competences as it does not provide enough opportunities to connect theoretical knowledge with actual teaching experiences in real-life classrooms and does not address issues such as parental and community involvement that would build teacher capacity to deal with a number of out-of-school factors relevant for inclusion.

Hence, teaching professionals themselves are the best source of information on how inclusion-relevant competences translate into their daily practices and what kind of support they need to develop those competences. However, school principals, parents and communities, government representatives, teacher educators and course designers, and relevant NGO and donor representatives must also be consulted regarding teacher competences for inclusion as these stakeholders can provide important insights into the context in which teachers operate.

Assumption 3: A philosophy of pluralism prevails among inclusive and culturally aware teachers

Educational inclusion is a much researched topic involving a number of challenges encountered in the policy-making and implementation processes. Interpretations of the notion of inclusive education itself vary from narrower senses as 'the attempt to educate persons with intellectual disabilities by integrating them as closely as possible into the normal structures of the educational system' (Michailakis and Reich, 2009) to broader definitions as a 'guiding principle helping to accomplish quality Education for All (EFA) – education systems that benefit from diversity, aiming to build a more just, democratic society' (Acedo, 2008), or even as a process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering and restructuring curricular organisation and provision and allocating resources to enhance equality of opportunity.

This process helps a school to expand its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend and, in so doing, reduces all form of exclusion and degradation of pupils on the grounds of disability, ethnicity, or any other issue that could render the school life of some children unnecessarily difficult (Sebba and Sachdev, 1997; Booth and Ainscow, 1998; Peček et al, 2006). In this broader sense, inclusion is a process to increase participation and decrease exclusion, where participation equates to recognition, acceptance and respect, inclusion in the learning process and social activities in a way that enables an individual to develop a sense of belonging to a group.

Similarly, in the literature on intercultural education, a variety of approaches range from 'culturalism', which places an emphasis on cultural differences and a need to accommodate any differences seen as typical of entire groups, to approaches known as 'pluralism' (ethnic or general) in which the emphasis is placed on diversity within groups (with or without explicit reference to ethnic relations), involving working on good relations within and between groups and their educational opportunities. The latter comes close to the 'equal opportunities approach', built on a vision of intercultural education where the emphasis is on pupils from ethnic minority groups and their educational opportunities. Intercultural education is seen as a means of combating the educational disadvantages of pupils from an ethnic minority background (Leeman and Ledoux, 2005).

In this study, we adopt the broader view of inclusive education as a process to reduce exclusion and contribute to the opportunities and skills for participation in society of all pupils, whilst adopting a balance between general pluralism and an equal opportunities approach to intercultural education.

The rationale for this choice is grounded on the arguments that such approaches reduce the emphasis on 'different' or 'additional' needs and any 'us and them' kind of antithesis, and imply the extension of what is 'generally available' in order to improve the learning and social participation in of all children. Extending what is 'generally available' reduces the need to provide support for what is 'different from' or 'additional to'. This approach is comparable to the architectural concept of 'universal design' where solutions are

anticipated by improved access for everyone and the avoidance of physical and other environmental barriers in the first place (Florian and Rouse, 2009).

The next argument in favour of the pluralist approach, is that a philosophy of pluralism prevails amongst culturally aware teachers (Ford and Trotman, 2001). Culturally aware teachers attempt to understand the worldviews of diverse students and respect them as different and legitimate. Educational research, even where it traditionally focuses on effective instruction and academic success, as in the Netherlands or Finland, recognises that quality of education is partly determined by the individual pupils, the moment and the context, and recognises that the professionalisation of teachers should focus more on 'diversity' and reflection of how diversity occurs in teachers' educational practice and on their actions on the basis of this reflection (Leeman and Volman, 2000).

Finally, the selected approach has the advantage of exposing two of the issues common in educational exclusion in the Western Balkans. Firstly, it is very common for schools to use subtle and not so subtle forms of exclusion (from the lack of communication with families and lack of language and learning support to physical barriers) to emit strong messages that some students are not welcome (Roma, ethno-linguistic minorities, disabled children) to the point that these children and their parents will seek segregation or avoid school altogether rather than experience rejection, humiliation or 'failure' in their local school.

Secondly, a pernicious notion of the school 'need to exclude' is exposed in some cases. This is phrased in terms of systemic factors that appear to place inclusion beyond the apparent benevolent human capacity of school staff to be more inclusive. Such exclusion is often voiced in regretful statements, such as "We would love to have more Roma children here but they come to us so late and are so behind in everything that they cannot pass the tests to progress up the school."

These systemic factors very often cover deeply held prejudices or profound ignorance of what can actually be done to include more diverse children, and these negative views often prevail over what is intended to be pro-inclusion legislation.

Assumption 4: Dispositions are predominantly socio-culturally developed

Socio-cultural theory offers a productive way of thinking about the development of teacher dispositions for inclusive education (Huizen et al, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Korthagen, 2004; Wubbels, 1992). In the Vygotskian tradition, the functioning and development of human individuals is studied in the context of participation in socio-cultural practices, of which teacher education is but one example. Individuals also learn and change through contact with other people in various contexts where people participate in activities. Such participation pre-supposes the 'moving inward' of social functions to be appropriated as psychological functions (Vygotsky, 1988-1999). In order to do this, individuals (teachers in this case) need an environment modelling an ideal standard and supporting conditions for a successful approximation of this standard – the zone of proximal development. They also need opportunities to explore public and social meanings behind the standard in relation to what makes participation personally meaningful to them.

Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian theories on teacher preparation are important in consideration of the opportunities for the development of inclusive dispositions provided by existing policies and practices in pre-service and in-service teacher preparation. Teacher preparation needs to help teachers orientate themselves

towards the values and goals provided in the cultural and political setting of the schooling in which they engage. Other influential theories, such as Kolb's theory of experiential learning (Kolb and Fry, 1975) and Schön's notion of the reflective practitioner (1983) suggest that the learning processes of the professional are associated with making sense of concrete experiences. Professionals do not just apply theories. They learn by doing and engaging in on-the-spot problem-framing and experimentation followed by reflection. Student teachers need opportunities to exercise their judgment in practice.

Moreover, some of the most influential authors in the literature on teaching professionals argue that the role of the professional extends beyond reflection on their own practice into the wider societal context in which they find themselves (Zeichner and Liston, 1987). This will be taken into account when considering the context and mechanisms for supporting and motivating teachers to adopt inclusive dispositions, both during pre-service preparation and in-service practices.

Assumption 5: Programmes based on beliefs about knowledge being value-laden and constructed by the learner are more inclusion-friendly

A comparative study of teacher education programmes (Tatto, 1999) identified two types of approaches underlying the design of teacher preparation programmes characterised as 'constructivist' and 'conventional'.

Constructivist approaches seem to:

- look at teaching as a vehicle towards a more equal and just society
- encourage student-teachers to see themselves and their pupils as makers of meaning
- provide opportunities for learning through discussion, reflection on and challenges to traditional conceptions of the teacher role, learner role, subject matter and pedagogy
- allow learning to teach to occur in context.

On the other hand, conventional approaches seem to:

- be driven by technical views of teaching and learning to teach
- show a tendency to see pupils as fixed entities or uncritical recipients of knowledge
- aim at helping teachers to fit into pre-existing school structures
- divorce teaching knowledge about subject matter and pedagogy from practice.

The study showed that in constructivist programmes, where teachers were seen as professional individuals capable of making informed instructional choices, teachers had more opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills to adjust instruction to the diverse needs of learners.

This finding is relevant in the consideration of existing programmes of pre-service preparation of teachers. The above characteristics of programmes were included in the items of a survey designed to explore the

provision of, and assumptions underlying, teacher education programme designs and teacher educator beliefs about the nature of knowledge.

Assumption 6: The programme experiences that help student teachers develop culturally responsive dispositions include five dimensions

A qualitative study (Kidd et al, 2008) of student teacher accounts of the experiences within teacher education programmes that helped them develop competences for inclusion, showed the importance of the following teacher education components:

- focus on issues of culture, linguistic diversity, poverty and social justice in special course units
- provision of practical experiences in diverse classrooms
- interactions with diverse families
- opportunities for critical reflection
- opportunities for discussion and dialogue

The survey within this study on behalf of ETF explored the presence of the above elements in existing pre-service teacher preparation. In the future, the survey findings will be used to consider how these key components can be enhanced to support teachers in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively increase the learning of all pupils, and to provide experiences that enable student teachers to examine issues relevant to social inclusion and understand how their own values, beliefs and teaching practices are shaped by their cultural backgrounds and prior experiences.

Assumption 7: Comparison of historically, culturally and politically similar countries can generate a knowledge base for evidence-based policy making

The knowledge base for policy making should be sought through cross-national studies with the aim of establishing meta-national commonalities in teacher competences for inclusive education in this region. Comparative research in education advocates cross-national research as valuable and even indispensable in establishing the generality of findings and the validity of interpretations derived from single-nation studies (Broadfoot, 1990; Kohn, 1989). Where similarities in cross-national studies are found, 'structural constants' or 'identities in social structures' should be identified that enable generalisation at the policy level. Given the similarity of issues addressed in this study across the countries involved, the findings can inform efforts to improve pre-service and in-service teacher education policies and practices in the Western Balkan region.

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